

# Screen

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**Brigitte Bardot**

**The Jewel in the Crown**

**Female psychopaths in Hollywood**

**MTV in Bosnia**

**Cuban cinema**

**37:3** Autumn 1996

RICHARD DYER: 'There's nothing I can do! Nothing!': femininity, seriality and whiteness in *The Jewel in the Crown* 225

CHANTAL NADEAU: BB and the beasts: Brigitte Bardot and the Canadian seal controversy 240

DEBORAH JERMYN: Rereading the bitches from hell: a feminist appropriation of the female psychopath 251

LIDA HUJIC: I hope you're enjoying your party: MTV in wartorn Bosnia 268

OSCAR QUIROS: Critical mass of Cuban cinema: art as the vanguard of society 279

#### **reports and debates**

GÖRAN BOLIN and MICHAEL FORSMAN: Film studies in Sweden: cinema arts and back again? 294

TOM RYALL: Moving Performance Conference 303

KAREL DIBBETS: Pordenone Silent Film Festival 305

#### **reviews**

WHEDBEE MULLEN: Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image* 307

JUDE DAVIES: Janet Thumim and Pat Kirkham, *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* and *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women* 312

IEN ANG: Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* 317

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## 'There's nothing I can do! Nothing!': femininity, seriality and whiteness in *The Jewel in the Crown*

RICHARD DYER

In representation, the processes of imperialism call forth white identities. When a text is one of celebration, then it is the manly white qualities of expansiveness, enterprise, courage and control (of self and others) that are foregrounded; but when doubt and uncertainty creep in, women begin to take centre stage. Although such a stark contrast of female and male white identities in the imagination of empire is bound to admit of many counter-examples, it is striking how often decline-of-empire texts do centre on women, most notably in fictions concerning the Indian Raj. The ur-text of these is E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, published in 1924 and adapted for stage, television and film; others include *The Rains Came* (novel 1937; film 1940; remake [*The Rains of Ranchipur*] 1956), *Black Narcissus* (novel 1939; film 1947), *The River* (novel 1946; film 1950), *Bowhane Junction* (novel 1954; film 1956), *Heat and Dust* (novel 1975; film 1982) and *The Raj Quartet* (novels 1966–75; television adaptation [*The Jewel in the Crown*] 1984).

Within this tradition, white women represent, often simultaneously, notions of conscience, cause and impotence. They express disapproval of British practice in India, although always at the level of how Indians are treated, rather than whether the British should be there at all. Yet, while expressing disapproval, they are also seen as the cause of imperial decline. They introduce affect and sexuality, debilitating their men and inflaming the natives. At the same time, while they criticize and undermine the Raj, they are also seen as impotent. They

may disapprove, but they cannot change anything: if they try, they fail or even do harm (a theme, for instance, of Rumer Godden's novels, *Black Narcissus* and *Kingfishers Catch Fire*).

In the first three episodes of *The Jewel in the Crown*, the words 'There's nothing I can do!', usually with an echoing 'Nothing!', are uttered six times, always by women. The sense of a refrain is reinforced by the unnaturalistic way in which they are both scripted and spoken, so that they stand free of surrounding speech, proclaiming themselves as emblematic (as does much else in the serial). Faintly echoed twice in the next ten episodes, they then return forcibly in the final one, in which the dialogue focuses repeatedly on the question of what can, and especially what cannot, be done. While the serial also mobilizes ideas of conscience and cause, it is this sense of impotence that is its keynote. The refrain directly states the position of the central protagonists, not just in terms of their historical situation, but also in the formal organization of the programme, its handling of seriality.

*The Jewel in the Crown* was a fourteen-episode, fifteen-hour serial,<sup>1</sup> produced by Granada television and first shown weekly from 3 January 1984 on ITV, with a repeat a few days later on Channel 4. The first screening was at the peak viewing time of 9 p.m., and for a drama of this kind it performed well in the ratings, averaging just over eight million viewers per episode. It was at once acclaimed as the epitome of what great television drama could be<sup>2</sup> and became a key reference point in arguments about 'quality television', not least in debates about the deregulation of British television under the post-1979 Conservative government. A programme note for a screening at the National Film Theatre in London in March 1990, as part of a television season about deregulation entitled 'Goodbye to All This?', calls *Jewel* the 'title everyone reaches for when asked for a definition of "quality television"'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Charlotte Brunsdon, in her discussion of the notion of quality in relation to television, observes that *Jewel* (and *Brideshead Revisited*) 'have come to figure, within discussion of television's fictional output, as the acme of British quality'.<sup>3</sup> It is both the status of *Jewel* in relation to wider notions of excellence in art, and its success within international, middle-class popular culture, that make it such a significant text.

*The Jewel in the Crown* does not deal exclusively with women, yet there are a number of ways in which it is for the greater part focused on them. Firstly, until episode ten, it is women – Daphne Manners and Sarah Layton – who, as listeners, observers and questioners, provide the perspective on other characters and events. Secondly, much of the serial can be situated in relation to the television genre most widely seen as for and about women, soap opera (indeed, some who disparaged *Jewel* did so by calling it merely a superior soap). *Jewel* eschews action, spectacle and the high emotional expressivity of

1 Episode one was double length. Strictly speaking, each episode (other than the first) runs to less than an hour, but they occupied an hour in the schedules, and with adverts and continuity announcements taken into account can be treated, to all intents and purposes, as hour-long.

2 For discussion of both the ratings and the critical response, see George Brandt, 'The Jewel in the Crown: the literary serial; or the art of adaptation?', in George Brandt (ed.), *British Television Drama in the 1980s* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 196–213.

3 Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Problems with quality', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1990), p. 85.

- 4 Christine Gledhill, 'Speculations on the relationship between soap opera and melodrama', *Quarterly Review of Books*, vol. 14, nos 1–2 (1992), pp. 103–24, argues that melodrama is not an exclusively feminine mode. On soap opera as a women's genre, see, among others, Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
- 5 cf. Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Crossroads: notes on soap opera', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1981), pp. 32–7.

- 6 Critics of the Right and Left read it in the same way, only with different amounts of approval; nor was it only professional critics who saw it thus. Dr Joy Cameron wrote to *The Scotsman* (2 February 1984, p. 10) complaining that the enthusiasm for *Jewel* could be readily explained: 'Knocking the British Empire is now a trendy thing to do', while Brigadier Eric Langlands in *The Daily Telegraph* (18 January 1984, p. 14) considered it 'in parts very anti-British'. (I should like to acknowledge here the presentation to my 1992 MA group by Jeff Crouse and Mikel Kovel on the reception of *The Jewel in the Crown*.)

melodrama;<sup>4</sup> like soap, it devotes much of its time to talk, talk about personal matters, gossip. Whether validly or not, such talk has often been seen as something in which women have special skill and investment, and one of the reasons why soap can be considered a women's genre.<sup>5</sup> To this we may add the contribution to *Jewel*'s success of costumes and domestic settings, also areas in which women tend to acquire more expertise, and amplified here by the vogue for retro fashion in the early 1980s. Thirdly, two of *Jewel*'s male love objects are figures from romantic fiction: Hari Kumar and Ahmed Kassim are glowering and difficult, harbouring a secret pain that the heroine alone can perceive, and, of course, darkly exotic. Where *Jewel* differs from romance is in not ending with a heterosexual settling down.

There is another, more unusual way in which *Jewel* may be seen as a woman-centred text. One of its most striking features is the use of foregrounded symbols. Not only do these all relate especially to women characters, but one of the most important is passed on from woman to woman in a lineage that bypasses the mother–daughter descent sanctified by the patriarchal family. This is some lace with applique butterflies. It has been given to Mabel Layton by her mother to be used as a christening gown for her first child. There are two pieces. Mabel, herself childless, gives one to her stepdaughter Sarah, who gives it to her sister Susan, who uses it for her fatherless child. The other piece Mabel gives to her friend Barbie who, on her death, bequeaths it to Sarah (with whom she may have been in love). Thus a distinctly female lineage is established that binds characters together and which is of primary significance for the audience in following and deciphering the serial – it draws us into a specifically female chain of signification.

Finally, *Jewel* may be seen as addressing women in its liberalism. A liberal position is not necessarily or exclusively feminine, but it is often thought so. Such a view is expressed by several characters in the serial, notably Ronald Merrick who tells Sarah that he thought when he first met her she was one of those English women 'who come over here with a bee in their bonnets about the rotten way we treat Indians', in effect invoking the liberal female type central to the literary tradition to which *Jewel* belongs.

Much of the contemporary critical response to the serial saw it as a leftist, anti-imperialist text, a view with which a minority, and notably Salman Rushdie, took issue.<sup>6</sup> Quite apart from its overwhelming interest in the British rather than the Indian experience of the Raj, its critique of imperialism is in terms of the failure, not the validity, of the attempt; it is critical of those British who treated Indians badly and thinks them typical, but it does not really criticize the very presence of the British in India. In both its handling of the idea(l) of the Raj and its explanation of its failure, it is conservative, and I deal with this next.

The Raj as an ideal is represented not so much in the serial's nostalgic tone as in a painting, 'The Jewel in the Crown', which is shown repeatedly throughout the serial, and in the character of Lady Manners. The painting depicts an Indian prince presenting Queen Victoria with a jewel on the occasion of a royal visit to India. As Barbie and Miss Crane (who both have copies) insist, the jewel that the title refers to is not the one proffered to Victoria, rather, 'the Jewel is India'. India is the finest possession of all in the British empire. The painting proclaims the ideal of the Raj, the 'hope' or the 'promise' as characters variously call it, something never questioned by the serial or the characters as an ideal.

This ideal is explored through the character of Lady Manners. She adopts Daphne and Hari's child, Parvati, and arranges for Hari's case to be investigated, which ultimately leads to his release, thus establishing her openness and lack of racial prejudice. Thereafter, she appears three more times in the serial, each time without speaking and with no clear narrative purpose: Sarah sees her in the street; Barbie sees her come into a church and genuflect before the altar; her car makes that carrying some other memsahibs swerve out of the way. She has, then, little narrative role, appears only briefly, says little, and yet her character is highly charged with significance. Lady Manners symbolizes the old Raj. After she has made their car swerve, the memsahibs wonder who it was and one of them remarks, 'If I know anything about it, we shan't see them again'. These women represent the current order, indeed, know something about it and have no time for the high ideals represented by Lady Manners. Yet the serial does have time for them. When Sarah and Barbie see Lady Manners they are profoundly affected by the sight; she seems to represent serenity, even transcendence, in the pettily wretched mess of their lives. This is conveyed by the way in which she is shot in her last three, tantalizingly brief, silent appearances.

She wears a topi with a cream-coloured veil. When Sarah sees her, she steps into the car and sits back, lifting her face to the sun with an ecstatic smile, the veil catching the sunlight in a radiant glow. In the church, she suddenly but noiselessly enters the church that is deserted except for Barbie; she genuflects, then leaves, opening the door so that the sunlight streams onto her face and veil. When she drives on, away from the memsahibs, dismissed forever from their world if they 'know anything about it', she at last rolls up the veil and beams beatifically at Parvati and his ayah. She is the light of the Raj, wise, open, serene.

Along with this glowing view of the good old Raj, *Jewel* also presents a view of the failure of the Raj that discloses a conventionally colonialist view of India and Indians. After the massacre in the final episode, Sarah expresses what might seem like a clear indictment of the Raj: 'After three hundred years of India, we've [the British] made this whole, damn, bloody, senseless mess'. Yet the idea that communal violence is a product of imperialism, that existing

7 Rajnaryan Chandavarkar, '“Strangers in the Land”: India and the British since the late nineteenth century', in C. A. Bayles, *The Raj, India and the British, 1600–1947* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1990), pp. 368–79.

complex patterns of conflict were focused and polarized by successive British administrations,<sup>7</sup> is not really pursued by the serial. Its interpretation of history is suggested rather in the notion of Pandora's box, the title of both episode thirteen and an article in the *Ranpur Gazette* discussed in that episode by Count Bronowsky and Guy Perron. The article argues that Indian independence will mean 'letting out all the evils that have afflicted India in the past but which until now have been imprisoned under the lid of British power and law'; Guy observes that it is a shrewd comment. In this perspective, India is a country of endemic, atavistic violence no more than kept at bay under the Raj; the failure of the Raj is the failure to change this, to civilize Indians out of their lethal tribal and fundamentalist loyalties.

Yet for all the above, there is still a sense in which *Jewel* can properly be considered liberal, a sense related to the period in which it was made, the early years of the Thatcher administration. The policies and tone of this government were widely felt to inaugurate a major shift in attitudes, one in which liberal values seemed to be discredited as ineffectual, harmful and, somehow most damning of all, really only the indulgence of a comfortably off, educated elite, the so-called 'chattering classes'. One response to the emergence of 'Thatcherism' was to identify it with the rise of a newly affluent working class, steeped in neither the middle-class sense of public service nor the older Tory *noblesse oblige*, ambitious, materialistic, insensitive, incipiently racist. This is expressed in the person of Ronald Merrick, *Jewel*'s hate figure, lower class, a policeman (that is, a member of a sector seen as allied to the Thatcher sensibility), racist and, most Thatcherite, at once nationalistic and yet scornful of 'soft' traditional values. The liberalism of the series is revealed in the way it sets up as villains those who speak in the language of Thatcherism, itself the scourge of liberalism at the time the serial was first broadcast. It is a liberalism that might be summed up as a lament for the decline of niceness as a ruling principle in public affairs.

One aspect of *Jewel*'s liberalism, which it shares with many other colonial texts, is its use of the motif of rape to explore imperialism. As Jenny Sharpe points out, in a study of rape in Raj fictions, this is not a continuous image in the colonial imagination. It is seldom found before the 1857 Indian Mutiny, but thereafter became common, a valuable discourse which permitted 'strategies of counterinsurgency to be recorded as the restoration of moral order'.<sup>8</sup> *Jewel*'s treatment is highly ambivalent. Daphne is raped, but it is not this that exercises the characters. It is as if the serial is embarrassed to have deployed the trope of black-on-white rape, yet is feminist enough not to wish to take the option (favoured, for instance, in liberal texts about the American South, such as *They Won't Forget* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*) of showing the rape either to be a fiction or to have been committed by a white man, and in either case involving the

8 Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of the Empire: the Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993), p. 6.

white woman in an act of lethal racial duplicity. Rather, all the concern is transferred to Ronald's handling of the case, wrongfully arresting Hari and the other young men. It may be called 'the Manners case', but sympathetic characters like Sarah and Guy worry more about Hari. This transferral away from the rape of the woman is heightened by the fact that Hari is himself raped by Ronald. Yet because, like all Indian characters, he is marginalized by the serial, the real force of the metaphor of rape (as imperialism) is muted. The complexity of the issues of sexual power that male-on-female rape involves, especially in imperial contexts, is evaded. The focus is on the helplessness of nice white people – above all, women – in the face of history.

*The Jewel in the Crown* tells a story of the last days of the British in India, but it chooses to do so through white characters who are seen as at once typical of, and yet largely marginal to, that history, and who thus both represent a key white position and yet have no role in the main lines of white imperial history. Moreover, its use of television serial form greatly attenuates the usual linear dynamism of that mode, emphasizing looking backwards over moving forward, and making symbolic connections which freeze rather than further the action. It is these dimensions, of the world of the serial and of the specific way it is unfolded, that construct white liberalism as a feminine inaction.

The sphere of power and history, of what is seen as really 'doing something', is, in *The Jewel in the Crown*, the sphere of men. This is glimpsed from time to time but, while central to the world the serial refers to, it is not central to it as a text. In other television serial fictions, the world of public power is either (US prime-time soaps) also a world of women or (British soaps) is felt as a kind of irrelevance to the real business of life, which is domestic and communal and in which women have great skill and power. In *Jewel*, by contrast, what matters to the central characters is the world of power and of the imperial project, 'India', but they themselves are peripheral to it. They are peripheral above all because most of them are women, but this can be reinforced by other factors, even with male characters. The two most important Indian characters, Hari and Ahmed, do not 'belong' to India. Hari has been brought up and educated in England and yet, with the death of his father, has to live in India, in which he does not even speak one of the indigenous languages. Ahmed is a Muslim whose father is a leading figure in a largely Hindu party, Congress, and who has in any case no interest in politics and feels that he does not belong. Both Hari and Ahmed are linked to English women who, to different degrees, do not belong: Hari, an orphan, is linked to Daphne, also an orphan, who moreover chooses to live with an Indian friend of the family and call her aunt; Ahmed is linked to Sarah, seen by the knowing figure of Bronowsky as being like Ahmed in her feeling that she does not belong. Other

factors may marginalize textually central characters: like Hari and Daphne, Ronald and Guy are orphans; Ronald and Barbie are despised by most of the other English characters for their lowly class origins, of which both are conscious; Ronald, Bronowsky, the orderly 'Sophie' Dixon and, possibly, Barbie are homosexual; Bronowsky and the less important characters of Sister Ludmila and Anna Klaus are white but not British (Ludmila may not even be a real nun, Anna is a Jew and a German in a country at war with Germany).

Until the final episodes, women are the centre of the narrative. There are important male characters, but Hari disappears early on and Teddie Bingham is killed. Only Ronald is given as much attention as Daphne, Sarah or Barbie, and he is both unremittingly unsympathetic and primarily an object of the other characters' appalled fascination. The serial's focus is women, to whom it allots three narrative possibilities: doing that fails; boredom and bitchiness; or, in Sarah, transfixed listening and observing.

There are two kinds of female doing in the serial, both of which fail. The first is in the form of the role that British imperialism did assign women: the civilizing mission, represented here by Miss Crane and Barbie Batchelor. The former is the first to utter the refrain, 'There was nothing I could do! Nothing!', which Barbie uses a little later, albeit in a very different context. Both believe that they have failed, not brought any of the children they taught to God, that there may not be any God. Miss Crane sets fire to herself; Barbie goes mad. The other kind of doing is more radical, but no more effective. Its most important example is Daphne. From the start, she wants to do something that will change things. When the matron of the hospital to which she is assigned says complacently that there may be things of which they might not approve (in policies towards Indians), Daphne says that they are perhaps things that ought to be changed. Similarly, she conveys to the district commissioner her disapproval that her 'aunt', Lady Chatterjee, as an Indian is not allowed to attend a War Week event. Such gestures are small; it is her love for Hari that makes her do more. She speaks quietly to the district commissioner about Lady Chatterjee, but minutes later makes a point of greeting Hari very loudly before her English companions. He, like the men Daphne is with, is an ex public schoolboy but, as an Indian, cannot attend the event and is only present as a journalist. Daphne not only speaks to him, in full view and hearing of everyone, but also leaves her companions and walks over to Hari, enters his space. This spatial transgression is repeated in her readiness to 'cross the bridge' (at once real and metaphorical) to have dinner with him and his aunt, and her asking him to take her to the Hindu temple, a place no other English woman has ever asked to see. Above all, it is she who invites Hari to dinner, introduces him to the romantic Bibighar gardens, perseveres in the face of his attempt to put her off, holds on to his hand when he is about to go, and draws him down to her to make love. For this she is

raped and assaulted, never sees Hari again, causes him to be locked up and himself raped, and dies in childbirth.

Daphne, not least through the touching awkwardness that Susan Wooldridge's performance gives her, is the most engaging, tough-minded and courageous character in the serial. Yet, structurally, she is the cause of all the trouble. The serial evokes both the idea that the very presence of white women inflamed native male desires to the point of destabilizing dominion, and the yet more deeply rooted misogynistic belief that women who are raped are to blame, for leading men on and 'really' wanting it. This is compounded by the use of the notion of Pandora's box.

Lady Chatterjee compares Daphne to Pandora. Even before the rape, she has clearly expressed her view – a mixture of anxiety and disapproval – of Daphne's relationship with Hari. Now she says to her:

I was afraid for you, now I'm afraid for all of us because of you. . . . You don't shrink from anything, even your mistakes, your marvellous mistakes. Like Pandora who bashed off to the attic and opened her blasted box.

Daphne's transgressive 'mistakes' are to blame for what is about to happen: Hari's arrest, torture, rape and imprisonment. It is, of course, unfair to blame her for these, but the serial gives us licence to do so through Lady Chatterjee's words. The notion of Pandora's box is picked up much later in the serial. There, explicitly, as discussed above, it refers to the notion that British rule has kept the lid on the simmering evils of India about to be unleashed with British withdrawal. Perhaps it means no more than this, but in a serial so characterized by echoes across episodes, it is hard not to make a connection with Lady Chatterjee's words. The British withdraw because they have failed; and they have failed because of their women, who have weakened the fabric of empire with both their sexuality and their questioning of the enterprise. They may not have caused the evils of India, but they are the reason why the British can no longer keep the lid on the box.

Daphne's doing creates havoc. No other woman in the rest of the serial dares do anything – not that most of them show any inclination to. The missionaries are barmy old women and Daphne is an exception; what is presented as the typical mode for white women, for memsahibs, is sitting around with nothing to do but be frightful. The only other possibility is embodied in the character who provides the continuity for most of the serial from episode three onwards, Sarah.

She is a character who listens more than she does. Ronald compares her to Daphne, but in order to say that they are not alike, that Sarah 'knows where to draw the line'. She replaces Daphne in the serial as the central focus and the liberal heroine, and she is fascinated by her and what 'the Manners case' represents (an indictment of the Raj). In

her relation with Ahmed, she seems to be about to repeat Daphne's experience. But she does not in fact do so. It would be wrong to suggest that she 'does nothing' at all, but there is an overwhelming sense of how constricted she is. She is repeatedly pulled back to the family of which she is in so many ways critical. When she plans to go away to be more useful in the war effort, she 'has' to stay back and look after Susan in her bereavement and confinement; when, after the massacre on the train, she wants to go back to Mirat and tell people about Ahmed's death, she cannot because she 'has' to look after her sister and aunt. This last example takes place in the context of the most explicit address to the question of her doing in the serial. At the station where the train pulls in after the massacre, she fills water pots; it is, she tells Guy, all she feels able to do – she cannot 'do the other thing', tend to the wounded and dying. A little later, when they talk on the platform now cleared of bodies, she says, 'At that tap, filling those bloody jars, I never hated myself so much as I did then – my brave little memsahib act'. Guy tries to comfort her with 'What else could we have done?', occasioning the strongest echo of the leitmotif of the series, when Sarah says, bitterly, 'Nothing. Nothing we could do.'

Sarah is transfixed and immobilized. She desires Ahmed but gets Guy, whom she then blocks from any further intimacy. She cannot go out into the world, she cannot go back to Mirat, she cannot go beyond filling pots with water. In Geraldine James's performance, she moves little, and when she does it can be ungainly, a literal embodiment of an inability to do. All that is really left for her is to listen and observe. Notably, she listens to those whom other people cannot bear or be bothered to listen to: Lady Manners, irritating old Barbie, Susan in her madness, even the despicable Ronald. And she really listens, trying to understand the significance of what is being related to her. Listening in a television serial is a significant position. Given the importance of talk in the form, listener characters often suggest a place for the audience from which to see things. We are in many ways asked to identify with Sarah, with her confused sense of conscience and her frustrated realization that there is nothing to be done. Yet towards the end of the series, we are taken away from her impotent position to the partial reassurance of a male listening position, in the person of Guy Perron.

Guy does not appear until episode ten, two-thirds of the way through the serial. His coming signals a shift away from the focus on women, not only through his person as the central listener but also, from episode eleven onwards, in a considerable increase of scenes between men alone. This goes along with a faster narrative pace, with strong mystery elements and the climactic massacre. It is as if the torpor of female incapacity has finally been displaced by male action. Guy is not active in any traditional heroic sense, nor is he at the centre of power; he, too, is marginal. He is an orphan and, although a public schoolboy, has disavowed his class position by refusing to become an

officer. Yet he has a marginality that also confers authority: he is a historian. This gives him, in the serial's terms, a reason to be in India: he is there in order to observe it. It also endows him with a knowledge of India, its history and culture, and credits him with an ironic, distanced view of reality.

It is this knowledgeable distance that distinguishes him from his female textual predecessors. He does not get emotionally involved; he is able to do more (he can go back to Mirat to break the news, he does try to make contact with Hari, not just talk and worry about him); above all, it is he, not Sarah, who most nearly puts together the pieces of the puzzle of Hari and what the Manners case signifies. Much of the serial is organized around the idea of puzzle solving, and three times characters use the phrase 'That fits' in discussing things, suggesting a jigsaw or crossword. The last occurs when Guy asks Nigel who Philoctetes was in Greek myth. This is the nom de plume of the author of an article in a Ranpur newspaper. Nigel tells him that Philoctetes was one of the Argonauts, who was left behind because he stank, but who did finally get to Troy because 'they needed him in the end'. When Guy says that that 'fits', it signals not only that he realizes 'Philoctetes' is Hari Kumar, but also that he understands Hari's historical role, the unacceptable Indian who has to be discarded but who will eventually be needed. This moment of knowledge is then backed up by the knowledge he gains access to – Nigel gives him the file on Hari, and both Sophie Dixon and Count Bronowsky give him information about Ronald, things that only Guy comes to know and can therefore piece together. By the end of the serial, Guy has assumed the commanding position of knowledge. He has the final words in voiceover, which offer a distanced position of wisdom and hope for the viewer. This position is, like that of Daphne and Sarah, one of impotence in relation to India and the imperial project, but without either the anguish that they experience or the hints of blame, the Pandora associations, that attach to Daphne.

It is not just the place of women in the serial's narrative – at once typical, yet marginal and helpless before events – that constructs a notion of white femininity as inaction. It is also the organization of the narration. Two aspects of serial form are relevant here. The first is the handling of sequence, the second is the connections made across the length of the serial. If the first of these tends in *Jewel* to create a mood of torpor, the second invites the viewer to turn attention away from the way events unfold to grasp a broader, overall structure of an essentially fixed kind. It is this combination of sequential torpor and structural fixity that realizes in the form of the serial itself the feeling of this white femininity.

Three aspects of sequence concern me here: pace, the order of events and the handling of breaks (between and within episodes).

The pace of *The Jewel in the Crown* has much in common with many classic serials: it is slow. This is somewhat less true of the first

9 Jane Feuer, 'Melodrama, serial form and television today', *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1984), pp. 4–16.

and last episodes, but otherwise it very much gives that impression that those who do not like this sort of thing complain of – the impression that nothing happens. In part this has to do with the fact that much of it consists of dialogue, looks and meaningful silences, a combination of soap-opera talk and Chekhovian drama. It also has to do with the handling of the ends of scenes, which very often carry on long after they have served their narrative function. Very occasionally this is to extend and intensify the feeling of the scene in a manner common in soap opera,<sup>9</sup> but more often there are no feelings to speak of. A typical example occurs in episode thirteen. Guy phones Sarah but, as she is out, gets her Aunt Fenny instead; Fenny explains Sarah's absence and they have a brief, polite conversation before ringing off. The sequence ends with a quite long take of Fenny putting the phone down and wandering off. There are no emotions in this sequence to be extended, and the shot of Fenny serves no narrative purpose. The use of such *temps mort* ensures that the unfolding of the serial is kept to a snail's pace. This suits its ruminative nature; it also conveys the tempo of an aimless, sluggish existence.

The feeling of a serial that is not going anywhere is also conveyed by the ordering of events. The overall organization is chronological, but there is little sense of a drive forward through the narrative; on the contrary, all feeling of momentum is stymied by the serial's concern with looking backwards. This is most obviously realized in the use of flashbacks, deployed to an unusually high degree for television drama. Of the fourteen episodes, only three (four, seven and eleven) have no flashback. Sometimes these further the characters' understanding of past events, solving a mystery of some kind (what happened to Teddie and Ronald in Burma? how did Ronald meet his death?), but often they have little such function. They hold up the narrative and remorselessly direct attention backwards. This is reinforced by the fact that much of the talk is about the past, endlessly raking over what has happened, especially the Manners case. Such repetitive talk is common in television serials: it acts as a recapitulation from episode to episode and, in soap opera especially, allows for the dissection of emotional responses to events. The repetition in *Jewel* has these functions, but it is both more cerebral – more trying to work out what has happened than exploring feelings about it – and also more futile – the more people talk about the past, the less they fathom it.

This lethargic sequential unfolding is in turn reinforced by the handling of breaks. It is usual for these to function as cliff-hangers, occurring at moments of maximum suspense, so that the viewer will keep on watching after the advertisements or the following week. What is remarkable about *Jewel* is how seldom this obtains.<sup>10</sup> Of the twenty-nine break points, only eleven could be construed as cliff-hangers, and of these only one (at the end of episode one) really has the suspense suggested by the term. Typically the breaks in *Jewel* are desolate or desultory, and often literally empty. Four occur at

10 This was first pointed out to me by Steven McGrath on a graduate course in which we were studying *Jewel*.

points of death, five at points of madness, none generating much sense of anticipation of what is going to happen. Closing moments of emotional intensity may convey a character's sense that their life (and consequently the serial's own story) is going nowhere: for instance, after Ronald proposes to Daphne, the pre-break shot has her looking away in a sort of anger, him looking on in disappointment; or, after telling her about Miss Crane's self-immolation, Barbie says to Sarah that Miss Crane never answered her letters, and a silence falls between them. Often the ending is yet more desultory (Teddie reading an unimportant letter from Susan as he sits on the loo; Sarah, Mildred and Fenny lapsing into silence after an inconsequential exchange at cross-purposes) or disquieting, yet without any precise emotional or narrative content (Sarah observing a one-legged patient coming down the corridor as she waits to see Ronald in hospital; the ghostly swinging of Barbie's dressing gown after Sarah leaves her in the mission hospital). Several breaks in the final episodes simply focus on one of the recurrent symbols discussed below (flames, the butterfly lace, the phrase 'a promise never fulfilled').

Many pre-break shots are also literally empty of people or at any rate significant characters. The bridge is left empty after Hari has crossed it (on his way to have dinner with Daphne); the image holds on the window to Hari's cell after he has walked passed it. In several cases, a character simply walks out of frame and the camera is left there: Ronald after the stone thrown at the car taking him and Teddie to the latter's wedding; Sarah waiting for a connection at a station; Guy entering his barracks; Hari disappearing behind a pillar.<sup>11</sup> Repeatedly the viewer is left with no one significant on screen, just a sense of emptiness.

Alongside the listless, desolate handling of sequence, the serial uses a number of images that recur without narrative function to speak of, but which constitute a set of symbols by means of which the viewer is enjoined to grasp the wider significance of the story and characters. These include the painting 'The Jewel in the Crown' and the piece of lace with butterflies on it, both already alluded to, and a circle of fire, seen both in a statuette of the God Shiva, dancing in a ring of fire, but also in literal rings of fire at various points (for example, Miss Crane's self-immolation, a scorpion killing itself when put in a circle of fire and, in the final shot of the serial, the painting of 'The Jewel in the Crown' burning up in a ring of fire until it shatters its glass and frame).<sup>12</sup> The handling of these images makes it clear that they are to be treated as symbols. The camera dwells on them; talk and action is held up by them; characters who want to understand (Daphne, Sarah, Guy) are shown in closeup gazing on at them thoughtfully. Several episodes end with a freeze frame on them, asking the viewer to register their symbolic importance.

The symbols contribute to the serial's lack of momentum. They propose that we treat the serial as a jigsaw or crossword puzzle, to see

11 He is seen (and heard in voiceover) walking past some street sellers and behind a pillar in the distance; the image freezes on the moment he is behind the pillar.

12 This shot was in the serial as originally broadcast, but is not in the retail video set of the serial.

whether, along with Guy and Sarah, we can work out how things 'fit'. In asking us to treat the temporal, sequential structure of a serial as a fixed, spatial one like a jigsaw or crossword, *Jewel* further undercuts any sense of narrative drive while offering us the alternative of the activity and fascination of putting things together.

The symbols are also about the problem of 'doing' in history. The painting depicts a scene which never took place, a promise never fulfilled. It refers to historial doing, but points continually back to a time when there was a belief in such doing that no longer obtains. We are repeatedly told that the butterflies sewn onto the lace are 'caught in a web', are 'poor prisoners', clearly representing the fate of the characters trapped in a complex situation from which they cannot escape, struggle how they might. We may take this as referring to the British in the last days of the Raj, or even to the human condition, but the most explicit association of the lace (as discussed above) is with the best white women – caring, thoughtful and exquisite, but also helpless and ineffectual, caught up in the complexities of a historical process they can do nothing about and from which they cannot break free.

The circle of fire is explicitly linked to the sense of a cosmic realm, beyond history, in Sister Ludmilla's words, 'the circle of creation and destruction, of dark and light, and wholeness'. We can do nothing about this, although the Indian gloss the serial provides suggests that this at least may be a comforting thought. More specifically, the ring of fire is also made to suggest the end of Raj history. Miss Crane's self-immolation is seen as an act of suttee, the practice in which a widow joins her husband on his funeral pyre; Miss Crane, as Ronald perceives, is a widow to her India, the Raj, which she realizes is now dead, hence the logic of her dressing in white 'like a good Indian widow in mourning' (as Lady Chatterjee remarks) and setting fire to herself. Similarly, the scorpion that seems to kill itself in the circle of fire is seen by Sarah as doing something brave in a situation where there is 'no way out'. The shattering of the painting suggests deliverance from the burden of history.

The symbols, then, press home the wider historical significance of the nice characters' more personal sense of stranded impotence, something in turn conveyed through the inertia of the serial's formal organization. The key characters in *The Jewel in the Crown* either do harm, notably Ronald Merrick, or else are overwhelmed with a consciousness of what they cannot do. Both things are true of Daphne. It is, however, that feeling of inanition that is most strongly conveyed. We are asked to pay attention to people – women, unmanly men, misfits, observers – on the margins of history, sometimes glimpsing those nearer its centre. Some of the former (Daphne, Sarah, Guy) we are also invited to identify with, to see the world of the serial through their eyes. We are prompted to experience that world in terms of both torpor, the reining in of narrative momentum, and engrossed

fascination in solving a puzzle. A position is thus constructed for us that worries and cares about historical processes – Britain’s imperial past, the onrush of Thatcherism – and yet feels unable to do anything about it. According to view, this is, among other things, an evasion of white complicity in imperialism, an acknowledgement of the historical marginalization of the feminine, an encouragement to complacency, or a compelling statement of the historical disenfranchisement of niceness.

## Appendix

The narrative content of *The Jewel in the Crown* is too complex to admit of complete summary here. The key characters and events of the serial concern Daphne Manners, Hari Kumar and Ronald Merrick. The year is 1942, the place Mayapore<sup>13</sup> in India. Daphne is a young English woman newly arrived in India who begins an affair with Hari. He, too, though of Indian parentage, has recently come to India, having been raised and educated (at public school) in England. During political disturbances, Daphne and Hari are set upon while making love and Daphne is raped. The local chief of police is Ronald Merrick. He randomly arrests a number of young men, including Hari. Ronald knows that Daphne and Hari were lovers; moreover, he has himself proposed to Daphne earlier and been refused. His interrogation of Hari is brutal, involving beating and sexual assault. Hari is thrown into jail for several months; Daphne dies giving birth to a child. This child, Parvati, is adopted by Daphne’s aunt, Lady Manners.

There is one other character in the first episodes who should be mentioned. This is Miss Crane, a missionary, who, on the same night that Daphne and Hari are assaulted, is herself attacked on the road. Daphne comforts her in hospital. Later, Miss Crane sets fire to herself.

The remainder of the serial deals with a new set of characters, Ronald Merrick providing the one character link. The focus is on the Laytons, an army family living in the hill town of Pankot. Colonel Layton, the commanding officer of the local regiment, is a prisoner-of-war in Germany. Left behind are his wife, Mildred, and two daughters, Sarah and Susan. The latter marries an army officer called Teddie Bingham, stationed at Mirat. At the wedding in Mirat, Ronald Merrick, now one of Teddie’s fellow officers, acts as best man. He has been dogged by threatening incidents since the Manners case. Both he and Teddie are soon posted to Burma and Ronald is disfigured when he tries, unsuccessfully, to save Teddie’s life in an attack. Sometime later, Ronald himself marries Susan, who has had Teddie’s child. Ronald is finally killed by unidentified Indians, the revenge for his behaviour during the Manners case at last accomplished.

The Laytons – Mildred, Sarah and Susan – live near Mabel Layton,

13 An invented name, as are Pankot and Mirat.

who is Colonel Layton's stepmother and now lives with a retired missionary, Barbie Batchelor. The latter is traumatized by the self-immolation of her friend and fellow missionary, Miss Crane, and comes to lose faith in her own calling. Despised and snubbed by most of the other memsahibs, she is forced to leave her home on Mabel's death, and dies in a mission hospital. Her one friend among the Pankot memsahibs is Sarah Layton. In Mirat, Sarah meets Ahmed Kassim and, although he is unwilling to let their relationship become romance, she does develop a friendship with him. He is the son of M. A. Kassim ('MAK'), a Muslim who is a leading member of the predominantly Hindu Congress party. In the final episode, which takes place a few days before Indian independence, Ahmed travels with Sarah, Susan and some other British people on a train from Mirat to Ranpur. The train is attacked by Hindu guerrillas, who call Ahmed out of the compartment and kill him, along with all the other Muslims on board.

Only one other character need be mentioned, Guy Perron. He knew Hari Kumar at school in England. An army sergeant, he is dragooned into working for Ronald Merrick. Through this he meets Sarah Layton, but, although they make love, she makes it clear that she does not want their relationship to go any further than this. He is with her, Ahmed and the others in the train which is attacked by guerrillas.

## BB and the beasts: Brigitte Bardot and the Canadian seal controversy

CHANTAL NADEAU

Once upon a time, in 1973, there was a little girl lost in the cold weather, lost in a little town and raised to believe that in the winter furs made life possible. I was about ten years old, and I knew nothing at that time about the libidinal properties of furs, with the exception of cats' performances in our backyard. As far as I was concerned, 'fur' meant that beaver hat and coat ensemble that my mom desperately wanted me to wear when it was below 30°C – an outfit with glamorous, genuine sealskin boots. Trying to picture myself at that time, I probably resembled a local version of Nanook of the North. Fur, for me, was a stinky, hairy, too-hot second skin, not exotic, not erotic; in other words the Canadian trademark *par excellence*.

If my knowledge of fur was less than aesthetic, then my awareness of Brigitte Bardot was more about feminine beauty and girlish exposure. My mother had been a big follower of Bardot for many years, avidly reading all the gossip about the star that was disseminated in those French-from-France magazines available in the periphery of the province of Quebec: *Paris Match*, *Jour de France*, *Elle*. But Bardot was not the object of my mother's fandom – she preferred Jackie Onassis and Queen Elizabeth. For my mother, Bardot was a torturous object of feminine fascination and catholic condemnation. Because of the scandalous aspects of her private life, we knew more about Bardot the glossy magazine star than Bardot the actress. Her films, then erotic, not exotic or romantic enough, were not popular at all among the girls. My friends and I were rather fond of her wild hair and her famous lips . . . that was before we heard about BB and her beasts.

1 See Jacques-M. Bourget,  
 'Feuilleton pour un massacre.  
 Bardot l'injure: "Canadiens  
 Assassins"', *L'Aurore*, 18 March  
 1977, p. 2.

Four years later, in March 1977, what was supposed to be a dream come true turned out to be a national catastrophe. The province of Quebec had just elected its first souverainist government, and BB the French star was 'in town' to protest against the annual seal hunt in Newfoundland and the Magdalen Islands. Suddenly, Canada was all over the media, a white, unified and cold country with such barbarian habits as clubbing baby seals for a national sport.

During the infamous *Canadiens assassins* campaign,<sup>1</sup> BB propagated an image of Canada that made a beast – the baby seal – an exotic commodity of the snow and the cold. For me, because of all those furs hanging around, this commodification of the Other opened up the erotic properties of the national territory. As someone who was caught in the catholic legacy and history of a French, then British, colony, the chance to occupy the position of barbarian was something quite exciting, wild and – why not? – productive. Looking back at that time, beyond the fact that I was intimidated by the vividness of the seal controversy, I was at the time overwhelmed by unusual and exotic fantasies. My knowledge of barbarians and assassins was informed by Hollywood films depicting hordes of furry and hairy Mongolians, all Yul Brynner lookalikes. Certainly, it never came to my mind to picture the Canadian landscape as exotic. So, by constantly attacking Canadians as organized hordes of barbarians and murderers of seals, Brigitte Bardot helped to reposition issues of Canadian national identity in terms of marginality, exoticism . . . and colonialism.

Meanwhile, BB's crusade, also known as 'Bardot's war against Canada', had convinced my mother that it was better to withdraw fur from the public scene and quietly wear out the beast in the discreet charm of the home. While Canadian television networks were reporting extensively on Bardot's best performance of her life, my mom was changing the face of the country by mercilessly attacking the hairy beast known as the emblem of Canada. With a lot of skill and a pair of scissors, she artfully cut pieces from my beaver coat to make . . . fur slippers. Today, I still don't know my mom's motivation: endorsing BB's fury, performing an act of domestic economy, or erasing three hundred years of colonial folklore. Of one thing I am sure; this was my very first experience of the erogenous and rebellious properties of furs.

According to Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch, the Venus in Furs is empowered by their erotic properties. As the primary condition of the contract between the masochist Severin and his mistress Wanda, the fur coat becomes an object of adoration and devotion that the dominatrix uses to tame the beast, promising infinite pleasures for the dominated. Sensual, fascinating, and perceived by the enslaved to be a symbol of the queen, fur evokes the coldness of authentic feminine beauty. For Severin/Sacher-Masoch, fur is the tyrant/sex goddess's

2 Cf. Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch, *La Vénus à la fourrure*, trans. Aude Willm (Paris: Minuit, 1967), pp. 119–248.

3 During her career as a 'chanteuse', Bardot recorded a song suggestively entitled 'Mon Léopard et moi'.

4 Simone de Beauvoir, *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1972). De Beauvoir argues: 'Her eroticism is not magical, but aggressive. In the game of love, she is as much a hunter as she is a prey. The male is an object to her, just as she is to him' (p. 20).

5 Following Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), throughout this article, I privilege the use of colonialism over postcolonialism to mark my insistence of addressing the seal episode through historical and cultural sets of complexities, contradictions and overlappings informed by centuries of configurations of power in the formation of national cultures.

6 'Bardot et Ses Amis' was the first name given to the Brigitte Bardot Foundation. Among the friends were other 'stars' such as Katherine Hepburn, Gregory Peck, Henry Fonda, Yvette Mimieux and Anouk Aimée.

7 See Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

8 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

privileged domain, and the only way to move the goddess and assure the docility of the slave is through the tactile act of petting the fur.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, or simply by historical detour, behind the Sacher-Masoch Venus in Furs I see Brigitte Bardot. From her film-within-the-film performance as The Leopard Goddess in *Boulevard du Rhum/Rum Runner* (Robert Enrico, 1971) to her tearful performance over the baby seal massacre, furs have definitely been associated with the Bardot characterized by Simone de Beauvoir as 'the sex hunter'.<sup>3</sup> Described by media and critics as wild, racy and loving in her relationships, Bardot's public history is a tapestry of fur patches and hunting trophies. But beyond the sex kitten celebrated by the media and male directors, de Beauvoir was also right to recognize the predator.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Bardot has been a hunter both inside and outside the cinematic machine, as her intervention in politics and her peculiar conception of cultural practices has shown.

Beyond its animal-rights activist dimension, the Brigitte Bardot seal episode in the late 1970s constitutes a unique example of late industrialized colonialism. Specifically, looking at Bardot's condemnation of seal hunting in Canada as a barbarian practice, her intervention enables me to rethink the ways in which star images and national marginality are co-constituted. Moreover, in the context of the history of colonization that links France and Quebec, the seal controversy certainly provides a powerful way to question how colonialism becomes embedded in representations and conceptions of national identity.<sup>5</sup>

Bardot's minimal, if not non-existent, knowledge of Canada and Quebec and their political economies has perpetuated a colonial representation of Canadian culture; an image of a marginal and irresponsible country still in need of a master or, in this case, a *mistress*. And given that under the colonial government fur was one of the most valuable exports from New France to the 'Old' France, Bardot's anti-fur activism offers an ironic twist to colonial history and memory.<sup>6</sup> As my personal history is informed by both the French linguistic aspect and by an awareness of growing up chased by English culture, Bardot's representation of Canada as 'one people' frames my way of articulating the relationship between nationalism, sexuality and female desire.

Jackie Stacey in *Star Gazing* discusses the desirable differences that national stars can generate in terms of identificatory practices, construction of memories and location of women's histories.<sup>7</sup> Given the specific position that Bardot the star represented for women in Quebec in the late 1950s and 1960s (and here I am talking about the Francophone community), I want to argue that Bardot's intervention echoed a historic relationship between sexuality, marginality and censorship in the formation of the national in Quebec.

If identificatory practices are also informed by 'intimacy between femininities',<sup>8</sup> Bardot's crusade facilitates the interrogation of gender

9 Ibid., p. 171.

10 The beaver. Jean Paul Sartre gave de Beauvoir this nickname because of her ceaseless work.

11 *And God Created Woman* (Roger Vadim, 1956) was the most targeted film by the ecclesiastical authorities. Given the alliance between the Church and the government of Quebec and its Board of Censors in 1957 (priests sat on the Board), Church condemnation was, in fact, a direct political intervention.

12 Ironically, the ban had less to do with the display of BB's body parts than the film's oh-so-wicked portrayal of family values.

13 This period (1939–59) actually coincided with the government of Premier Maurice Duplessis, leader of the *Union Nationale*, an ultra-rightwing party committed to the preservation of the traditional values preached by the Church.

14 Interestingly enough, after a legal battle, the film *And God Created Woman* was released uncut in Quebec in 1957. For a gossip account of the battle with both the censors and the Columbia lawyers, see Jean-Pierre Desmarais, *Révolutions d'un survenant du cinéma* (Montréal: Les Éditions Lumière, 1982).

and women's roles in the production of the national. Considering that 'identifications do not take place exclusively within the imagination, but also occur at the level of cultural activity',<sup>9</sup> it appears that the real cultural activity, emphasized by Bardot's call for a ban on seal hunting, specifically concerned women's work as the guardians of the nation.

### 'Le Castor'<sup>10</sup> and BB

Throughout her entire career, Bardot has symbolized sexual freedom and irreverent pleasure, an outstanding and public case for the dangerous sides of seduction. But as a French (from France) emblem of femininity, her star image has never been challenged in terms of sexual economy and colonial power. In the specific case of Quebec, what made Bardot remarkable was the double status she – to this day – occupies. For a lot of women in Quebec, Bardot's representation as a French-speaking star could be seen as an element of recognition, even identification, while her sassy sexuality was framed as belonging to the *other* culture (Europe).

Bardot's media profile strongly echoed the contradictions that Quebec was facing in the 1960s: a period known as the Quiet Revolution which marked a rupture with the familial discourse and the supremacy of the Church. Politically, the period heralded the rise of the Quebec independence movement which, historically, had always romanticized France as the 'natural' ally. So, from the late 1950s to the beginning of the 1970s was a very unstable period in Quebec in terms of traditional values and new political concerns. And one should not forget that, through its Constitution, Canada was still a British colony.

In this sense, it is little wonder that Bardot has a long history of controversy in Quebec. As Vadim's muse, Bardot saw some of her films banned by the Catholic Church<sup>11</sup> under the rubric of material sexually offensive and morally depraved.<sup>12</sup> In the midst of the 1950s (a period now called *La Grande Noirceur* – The Great Blackness),<sup>13</sup> Bardot's film performances disrupted a society historically indebted to French culture and catholicism. It would be presumptuous for me to pretend to offer an in-depth analysis of the history of censorship in Quebec.<sup>14</sup> My concerns are more directed towards the generally accepted idea that women were the most virulent opponents of the distribution and screening of Bardot's films in the USA, and of Brigitte Bardot's sexual image. One cannot ignore the fact that in Quebec the censors were unquestionably male representatives of all-powerful political institutions, the State, the Church and the Francophone-petite-bourgeoise, mostly Catholics. If, effectively, women were present and active within pro-censorship groups (mostly

15 Here is Roger Vadim's account of the uproar that followed the release of his film in the USA: 'Committees for the protection of morals were organized in more than a hundred cities to prevent the film from being shown. Sermons in churches and temples threatened Brigitte and those responsible for the "satanic" work with eternal fires of hell. Women were the most indignant. They were not defending sexual equality but protecting the traditional institutions of marriage and the weaker sex in society.' See Roger Vadim, *Bardot, Deneuve, Fonda: My Life with the Three Most Beautiful Women in the World*, trans. Melinda Camber Porter (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 113.

16 Ginette Vincendeau, 'The old and the new: Brigitte Bardot in 1950s France', *Paragraph*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1992), p. 86.

17 De Beauvoir, *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*, p. 7.

affiliated with Catholic authorities),<sup>15</sup> they were also considered to be faithful consumers of movies and buyers of a range of derivative products created by the star industry. However, my aim is less to reconstruct a gendered division between production and consumption than to emphasize the fact that, beyond the cinematic space condemned for its degenerate influence, there was a realm of consumption within which women were able to perform different sorts of identification.

Brigitte Bardot's persona has always been considered in terms of a heterosexualized film nymph and sex goddess. Simone de Beauvoir and Mandy Merck have raised the issue of the ambiguity of Bardot as a star and French sexual bombshell for a *male* audience, but barely anything has been said about how women responded to Bardot's public performances. Ginette Vincendeau does discuss Bardot's sexual image in relation to the commodification of youth culture and French fashion in the 1950s, suggesting the inclusion of a female following, but, at the same time, Vincendeau perpetuates the image of Bardot as an exclusively male delight by asserting that, 'There is no doubt that Bardot's to be looked-at-ness as displayed in her films is predominantly a sexual one aimed at male spectatorial pleasure, inscribed in the films by male onlookers, rather than one aimed at women (*even if the possibility of a pleasurable female look at Bardot is not ruled out*)' (emphasis mine).<sup>16</sup> Interestingly enough, it seems that it is always outside her film performances that Bardot's image is seen as (potentially) addressing the woman subject. Such an assertion by Vincendeau reinforces a strong tendency to split the onscreen/offscreen persona into two exclusive spaces: the film performance being defined as the site of the male gaze, and the fashion-modelled performance as a female domain.

If sexuality is clearly asserted through identificatory practices such as those of the fashion world, little has been said about the commodification of national identity in the representation of the star persona. For example, neither Beauvoir nor Merck have questioned Bardot's sexual representation through the political and national scene. In fact, star theory hardly questions how sexuality and national values intertwine in the circulation and regulation of identities. If the nationality of the star is put at the forefront, it is always to emphasize the so-called folkloric traits specific to a culture.

Simone de Beauvoir's piece on Bardot offers a perfect example of this typification of cultural traits which maintains national identity as a masculine cultural practice, and sexuality as a marginal site for addressing the politics of the national. Written first for the trendy, high-class male intellectual readers of *Esquire*, de Beauvoir's article maintains a cultural and gendered construction of the controversial reception of Bardot in France in the late 1950s. De Beauvoir argues that BB is the victim of 'the French public's very peculiar hostility'<sup>17</sup> and an icon of American adoration.

18 Cf. Mandy Merck, 'Marilyn Monroe by Gloria Steinem, Brigitte Bardot by Simone de Beauvoir', in *Perversions* (London: Virago Press, 1993), pp. 61–85.

19 A good example of heterosexist history can be seen in the origin of Bardot's stage name, BB. The BB label, in fact, has nothing to do with the movie star, but with the heterosexual and protective construction of 'la Bardot' identity. At the request of her parents, the initials BB were used as a nickname to protect her identity when she modelled for the first time for the French magazine *Elle* (1949) when she was only sixteen.

20 De Beauvoir argues that: 'The sexual equality that BB's behaviour affirms wordlessly has been recognized in America for a long time. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons that have been frequently analysed in America, he [the Frenchman] feels a certain antipathy to the "real woman".' De Beauvoir, *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*, p. 23.

21 De Beauvoir says: 'In France, many women are accomplices of this feeling of superiority in which men persist. *Their men prefer the servility of these adults to the haughty shamelessness of BB*' (emphasis mine). *Ibid.*, p. 23.

22 Vincendeau does, at least, acknowledge women's role in the fashion economy developed around Bardot the film star.

23 As one article strategically puts it: 'Brigitte Bardot: deux fois vingt ans', *Le Monde*, 13 December 1975.

In opposition to the recurrent image of the little girl found in the French press, de Beauvoir offers an emancipated, independent, don juanesque portrait of Bardot. Besides the fact that one can see in this apology for Bardot a hint of lesbian voyeurism,<sup>18</sup> I also recognize in de Beauvoir's study the perfect example of heterosexist history.<sup>19</sup>

In her defence of 'Bardot-the-natural-born-sexual-hunter', de Beauvoir completely elides the historical and ideological context within which the myth of Bardot has been created and incessantly reinforced. Providing a psychosocial portrait of the expectations that US and French men have of the ideal woman, de Beauvoir locates the main difference between the two groups as a feeling of superiority. Because de Beauvoir opposes the so-called egalitarian spirit of the men in the USA to the macho superiority of their French counterparts to explain why Bardot was more welcome in the USA than in France,<sup>20</sup> she confines her analysis of Bardot within the limits of heterosexuality: as an object traded between men.

Exploiting the traditional division between the nymph goddess and the wife-mother in her analysis, de Beauvoir's argument objectifies women by simply ignoring them as social subjects. Her sympathetic portrait of Bardot may betray her fascination with BB as well as hinting at a feminist concern for the BB phenomenon. But her analysis of women's response to the sex-kitten is, on the contrary, informed by heterosexist assumptions and *elitist*, bourgeois considerations. By proposing that the *popular* animosity towards Bardot is principally due to a feeling of male superiority with which many female viewers are 'accomplices', de Beauvoir perpetuates a historical conception of women as men's shadow.<sup>21</sup> In other words, de Beauvoir silences women in the creation of the myth of Bardot, and denies the fundamental role that women have played historically as consumers of stars and fashion products.<sup>22</sup>

The recognition of women's active role in the circulation of star images is fundamental to my analysis of the Bardot seal crusade in Quebec. Bardot was first of all a women's star, and the campaigns against seal hunting were designed to address both the fans of BB and the consumers of furs: women. Interestingly enough, BB was, perhaps for the first time in her life, talking to women of her own age, if not older – the women who knew her as the queen of the tabloid magazines and the star of French cinema.

In 1977, BB was forty-three, had been retired from an acting career for six years, and was offering women an image/body sensibly different from the one fabricated by the cinema camera. Framed as mature, authentic (no makeup, no plastic surgery), responsible, but still incredibly desirable,<sup>23</sup> Bardot then took on the respectable image of the middle-aged woman dedicated to a cause. Bardot herself wanted her image to come across in this way, as she assertively revealed

**24** This candid revelation might also suggest that women of a certain age, because they cannot be attractive anymore, have 'gone to the dogs' Bardot cannot help her reputation as a dumb woman. But my point here, besides pointing out the hilarious analogy between pets and men, is to emphasize the tremendous control that Bardot was now maintaining over her private life.

**25** The use of seal fur was, ironically, pretty marginal in the fashion industry. The fine white furs coming from the baby seals were mostly used for accessories (boots, handbags) and the meat was appreciated as fine cuisine.

**26** This photo of Bardot with the baby seal was taken from a longer filmed sequence ostensibly made for the Brigitte Bardot Foundation. This extended sequence, which worked in the style of Greenpeace consciousness-raising videos, was included in an episode of *Biography* on the Arts and Entertainment network. The opening shows Bardot flying in a helicopter, looking down on a landscape of snow and ice, waiting to land. The camera cuts to Bardot as she walks on the icy land, her hair down, wearing her infamous jeans, boots and hip cut white coat. She gets down on her knees, lies down next to a baby seal, kisses the seal, and says: 'N'ait pas peur on les aura, va' (Don't worry, we'll get them). Cut to Bardot as she looks straight into the camera. Cut to a closeup of BB and the baby seal.

during a television interview: 'I gave my youth to men, I am now giving my wisdom to animals'.<sup>24</sup> This reassuring image of the woman with a cause echoes the liberal and bourgeois tradition, in the USA and in Europe, of wealthy women's involvement in charity works.

This is why I strongly believe that Bardot's campaign to stop the baby seal cull in Newfoundland and the Magdalen Islands constituted an outstanding piece of marketing designed to target women as the main consumers of fur.<sup>25</sup> Pictures of Bardot were carefully staged to give a strong sense of the nurturing and caring woman, surrounded by pets and animals. One of the most successful campaigns by Bardot's Friends portrayed her as a natural animal lover, and stressed the unnatural dimension of baby seal killings. Certainly, the most famous and dramatic picture is of Bardot lying in the snow, a baby seal in her arms, protecting the beast from a potential hunter.<sup>26</sup>



**BB and the beast in  
Newfoundland. Photo by  
Sygma.**

27 See Louis-Gilles Francoeur, 'Le syndrome de Bambi', *Le Devoir*, 22 March 1995, p. A1.

28 In Annette Kuhn with Susannah Radstone (eds), *The Women's Companion to International Film* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 36. Ginette Vincendeau suggests that Bardot was a box-office hit but not popular.

29 See Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist nostalgia' in *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), pp. 68–87.

30 To give a sense of the national commodification of BB, see Gilles Roche, 'Lutèce a eu sainte Geneviève, Charles VII a eu Jeanne d'Arc, Louis XI a eu Jeanne Hachette: La Vième République a Bardot', *Le Monde*, 6 December 1961, p. 13. Roche ironically refers to Bardot as 'Notre Dame de l'abandon'.

31 'Brigitte Bardot: une Légion d'honneur pour tous les animaux qui souffrent!', *Ciné-Revue*, no. 16 (April 1985).

32 Vincendeau, *The Women's Companion to International Film*, p. 36.

The rhetorical discourse of the seal campaign was based upon highly emotional publicity which emphasized the fact that the 'hunted' was a three-week-old baby seal. Bardot's activist campaign, also renamed by the Canadian press the 'Bambi Syndrome',<sup>27</sup> echoed the traditional role of women as guardians of nature. Given that this question of survival has always been at the very core of the nationalist discourse in Quebec (through issues of language and low birth rate), the seal campaign reshaped the traditional imagery of the nation in terms of a symbiotic link between the woman and the land, national identity and territory. Since Bardot had been portrayed as a bad mother in 'the real' by the tabloid press – she basically turned down the role of mother by giving up her only son to her ex-husband Jacques Charrier – she redeemed her feminine and maternal side with her love for animals.

The seal episode came to blur the distinction between the representation of Bardot the film star and the reception of BB in the media. Despite the fact that she had appeared in more than forty-five films in twenty-two years, I consider Bardot less a movie star than a media star,<sup>28</sup> and her full awareness of this has changed the way she has represented herself and has been represented as a public persona. In fact, because she refused to see her film roles as performances, did not like to act, did not believe in cinema, preferred to be herself rather than a character, and claimed everywhere to be *la Bardot-tout-court* (La Bardot, period), Bardot is recognized to have been one of the first stars to exercise full control over her public image.

Bardot succeeded in exploiting tabloid strategies to create gendered national identity, first as a star and then as an animal activist. The paradoxes and discourses privileged in tabloid papers were used in the seal episode as a strategy of militancy and reactionary activism, informed, I would say, by a colonial if not 'imperialist nostalgia'.<sup>29</sup> In the case of Bardot, her intervention in seal politics and the circulation of her image as a sexual icon represents a form of regulated visibility in terms of national property. As popular as another French delight (the 'foie gras'), Bardot has been cast as a French national symbol.<sup>30</sup> Her body has been immortalized through a miniature of the Statue of Liberty, she has been awarded the Légion d'Honneur for her involvement in what she calls 'the cause of her life: SOS animals',<sup>31</sup> she has even had her bust used as a model for Marianne, the bountiful symbol of the Republic.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Bardot embodies the image of the national as the sexual and commercialized spaces which have historically been at the very basis of colonial relationships.

In short, one cannot understand the polemical reception of Bardot as a movie star if one does not look at Bardot the media star. While appearing quite disruptive, her image was, on the contrary, perfectly regulated. In fact, I want to argue that her media image was available as a consensual national icon. Considered in the 1960s to be more important for the French economy than the car manufacturers Renault

<sup>33</sup> See André Maurais, 'BB: the sex kitten grows up personality', *Playboy* (July 1964). According to Maurais, 'Statisticians have accorded Brigitte a more important place on the list of French exports to the U.S. than Renault and Citroen combined' (p. 87).

<sup>34</sup> See *Vanity Fair's* column 'Social Study' on Bardot, December 1994. On US television, the Arts and Entertainments network featured Brigitte Bardot in January 1995 on its *Biography* series. The French-Quebec network Radio-Quebec ran a special on Bardot, commemorating her career as a 'chanteuse', *Bardot en Chanson*, during Autumn 1994.

<sup>35</sup> Bardot's attacks were directed against the exclusive contract, valued at a million dollars, that Loren had just signed with the glamorous Italian furrier Annabella. Accusing Loren of 'deliberately choosing the side of death', Bardot dramatically concluded her open letter to Loren, published in the papers worldwide, in these terms: 'Don't forget that when you have a fur coat, you're wearing a cemetery on your back'. See Mike Neill et al., 'Showing her claws', *People Weekly*, vol. 42, no. 9 (1994), pp. 85-87.

The seal campaign in 1995.  
Cartoon by Serge Chapleau,  
published in *Le Devoir*, March  
22 1995, p. A8.

and Citroen combined, Bardot's national value was less determined by her acting performances than her media exposure.<sup>33</sup> Her role as tabloid queen rapidly assured her the status of the most in demand and demanding star in the world. And as the crusade in Newfoundland showed, the tabloid dimension of her public persona was a key factor in the strategies designed for her animal rights campaigns.

Until last summer, I had almost forgotten Brigitte Bardot and her rescue mission in Canada. Bardot was playing 'la Garbo' in the south of France in her St. Tropez domain, surrounded by her forty cats, twenty dogs, her donkey and her latest husband (for once, less known as 'Mr Bardot' than as a friend of the right-wing leader of *Le Front National*, Jean-Marie LePen). At the same time that the French 'official' media were justifiably giving her hell for flirting with a racist party, the tabloid press and the television networks in France and the USA celebrated her sixtieth birthday. *Vanity Fair*, *A&E Biography* and Radio-Quebec all offered their stories of BB.<sup>34</sup> While some of the European tabloids featured Bardot's catfight with Sophia Loren (Bardot accused Loren of wearing a 'cemetery on her back'),<sup>35</sup> in Quebec, BB was at the centre of a commemorative celebration. The SPCA-Montreal was asking for the support of the Brigitte Bardot Foundation; vintage and collectables stores were displaying images of, and items associated with, Bardot-the-sex-kitten. Even Jessica Lange



36 The seal penis market is mostly targeted at Asia, where the seal penis is used as an aphrodisiac. Asian businessmen are willing to pay up to \$35.00 CAN per piece. Of course, this 'delicate' subject has been addressed by Bardot and other activist groups, notably the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), as another example of the uselessness of the seal killing. The animal lovers use the matter of male impotency to get media attention; see Denis Arcand, 'Le pénis de phoque, un sujet délicat', *La Presse*, 25 March 1995, pp. A1–7.

37 See, particularly, Pierre Foglia, 'L'écologie du bâton', *La Presse*, 23 March 1995, p. A5; and Agnès Gruda, 'Le péché d'esthétisme', *La Presse*, 22 March 1995, p. B2.

38 See Myriam Gagnon, 'La Fourrure reprend du poil de la bête', *Elle Québec* (November 1994), pp. 85–92.

had been paying homage to La Bardot in *Blue Sky* (Tony Richardson, 1994). And, more importantly, BB herself returned to Canada to strike back against seal hunting and the *Canadiens assassins*. This new seal controversy reached a tremendous xenophobic pitch on both sides as the magnitude of the barbarity of different cultural delicacies was debated: foie gras vs seal penises<sup>36</sup> – which one is more savage? Bardot's outburst against seal hunting received high media exposure and was attacked from every front, from fishermen, to officials, to columnists.

Beyond the traditional 'look first in your own country' arguments, and the predictably vicious and misogynist attacks against the fading and ageing star,<sup>37</sup> a radio anchorman managed to trap Bardot in a media prank highlighting her unawareness of Canadian and Québécois political history. Radio personality Pierre Brassard telephoned BB at home in France and told her that he was, in fact, the Prime Minister of Quebec, Jacques Parizeau. Imitating Parizeau, Brassard asked BB if she would promote Quebec independence from Canada in exchange for a ban on baby seal hunting. Broadcast live, on Quebec radio, BB candidly agreed.

The story hit its peak when, a couple of days later, the same anchorman called Bardot again. This time, Brassard pretended to be the Prime Minister of Canada, Jean Chretien. Again, Brassard/Chretien promised Bardot support for her cause if she would campaign *against* the sovereignty of Quebec. In a puzzled and confused state, BB gave up and suggested to include in the deal both Canada's magnificence and Quebec's sovereignty. For those familiar with the endless constitutional shifts and fights in Canadian politics, her remark, while apparently ridiculous, neatly summarized the current ambivalence and confusion concerning the independence debate.

While BB was being trapped by the radio pranksters, fur was back on the Montreal fashion scene.<sup>38</sup> The Bay, one of the most important retail stores in Canada, and the first trading post in New France in the seventeenth century (The Hudson Bay Company), was commemorating its 325 years of loyal, royal service to the community. In downtown Montreal, on St. Catherine Street, The Bay's window displays consisted of *tableaux d'époque* which featured everything from the generosity of native peoples, to the industriousness of the fur trappers and the courage of the *first* French colonizers. The Bay's huge streetfront windows offered to Montrealers and tourists a glimpse of the splendour of the pioneers and the grandeur of the trading tradition. Fur once again generated a narrative for Canadian national identity.

As a frozen moment in the pure tradition of an ethnological tourism, Bardot's past and more recent visits to the icy land of Newfoundland and the St. Lawrence Gulf marked a disruptive moment in the

39 Stuart Hall, 'What is this "black" in black popular culture?', in Gina Dent (ed.), *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), p. 24.

40 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 1.

41 Richard Dyer, 'The role of stereotypes', in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 16.

recognition of national identity and star following. According to Stuart Hall, 'there is always a price of incorporation to be paid when the cutting edge of difference and transgression is blunted into spectacularization',<sup>39</sup> and this price is called negotiated visibility. This is exactly how my thoughts about the Bardot and the beasts episode cross my mind in the context of Canadian history: as a space of negotiated visibility; in other words, as a wonderful piece of colonial imagery and fantasy.

If, as Partha Chatterjee puts it, nationalisms 'depend upon the acceptance of a common set of standards by which the state of development of a particular national culture is measured',<sup>40</sup> images of barbarians and savages are certainly part of a Canadian national identity. Given that the use of stereotypes, according to Richard Dyer, 'is a necessary, indeed inescapable, part of the way societies make sense of themselves, and actually make and reproduce themselves',<sup>41</sup> I have to confess that the contact of the furs on my bare skin was determinant in my own 'recollection' of the BB and the beasts episode. Bardot's mothering rescue of the baby seals offered a personal site on which sexuality and national values intertwine in the regulation of identities.

If, in terms of memories, I like to fancy Bardot as the star we/I did not have a crush on, I have to say that, for different reasons, our personal history brought us to share similar feelings: we both had strong reactions to fur – but for different reasons. And just for that, I would like to remember Bardot as the one who made (my) Canadian history.

I want to thank Joy Van Fuqua for sharing with me the BB frenzy and for providing challenging comments to develop my argument.

# Rereading the bitches from hell: a feminist appropriation of the female psychopath

DEBORAH JERMYN

Dangerous women, in one form or another, have always been a staple of the cinema. From the vamps of early silent cinema, to the countless femmes fatales of film noir, the threatening woman or the woman who kills has long been an object of simultaneous horror and fascination. In this article, however, I wish to argue that a substantive new generic development, in the form of the female 'psychopath', has recently taken place in Hollywood's contemporary psychological thrillers. She represents an excess that has rarely been seen before, a woman whose violence, cunning and monstrosity are almost unparalleled in the women who form her cinematic predecessors. This article will look at three specific examples of the genre: *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), arguably the forerunner of this cycle; *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1992); and *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992).<sup>1</sup> Beyond these films, there have been numerous other recent variations on the same theme, for example *Black Widow* (Bob Rafelson, 1987), *Misery* (Rob Reiner, 1990), *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992), *The Crush* (Alan Shapiro, 1993) and *Mothers Boys* (Yves Simoneau, 1993). In exploring the figure of the female psychopath, this article intends to address a significant gap in feminist film criticism, since this figure has received almost no detailed critical attention and has typically, and rather superficially, been dismissed as another reactionary representation of single or independent women. Most commonly, the films have been referred to as the 'women from

<sup>1</sup> That said, *Fatal Attraction* obviously borrows from previous texts, most obviously *Play Misty for Me* (Clint Eastwood, 1971). However, the films being examined in this article give significant space to developing their female psychopath characters. Psychological motivations are much more apparent, however simplistic these may be.

hell' subgenre. For example, Joy Andrews reviews *Single White Female* by first pointing to its pedigree:

SWF is the latest in a series of anti-heroine movies which are making millions. The genre is known as The Woman From Hell. They are all women who appear in normal, domestic or relationship situations and at first appear to be well-adjusted. Only later is it understood that they are dangerously deranged. First comes the Mistress From Hell (*Fatal Attraction*), next the Nanny From Hell (*The Hand That Rocks The Cradle*) . . . and then the Lesbian From Hell (*Basic Instinct*) and now The Flatmate From Hell.<sup>2</sup>

2 Joy Andrews, *Mail on Sunday*, 10 August 1992, p. 35.

Such descriptions are widespread, 'women from hell' being a rather catchy term of reference. But although expressive, it is obviously not substantial. The female psychopath is worthy of far more detailed analysis since she both reaches an unsurpassed level of violence and deception and enters scenarios which explore women's changing roles and 'new' freedoms in a supposedly postfeminist age. This is a significant combination, since many of the fears about the female killer and fears of feminism are entirely the same; both undermine the foundations of sexual division in our culture. Crucially, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the female psychopath subgenre began to appear at a time when the media were becoming increasingly fascinated with exploring the notion of conflicting roles for contemporary women.

In analysing these films, this article will adopt the feminist methodological approach of 'appropriation' or reading against the grain. Of course, this approach is not universally accepted as a positive approach by feminists, and it does have a number of shortcomings. It does not adequately challenge the actual mechanisms of dominant ideology in popular culture, and seems to accept that female spectators/readers have been placed in a marginal subject position and must recuperate their pleasures by furtively reinterpreting the texts before them. But, despite these limitations, the method of appropriation is particularly relevant to the project here. Whilst acknowledging these films to be essentially reactionary texts, this article seeks to illustrate how the female psychopath can also be read as offering progressive or oppositional possibilities for female spectators, for confronting dilemmas and exercising a behaviour in which they are not usually allowed to indulge. The notion of an active female spectator is absolutely crucial to understanding the pleasures that women are able to recuperate from texts that initially seem to suggest only female masochism. This is not to suggest that these films offer 'positive images', or indeed that the major project of feminist appropriation should be to seek such images at all; rather, as a great deal of feminist film criticism has shown, the notion of positive images for women is one plagued by theoretical inadequacies and it is not my aim here to uncover examples.<sup>3</sup>

3 For a more detailed discussion of this debate, see Diane Waldman, 'There's more to a positive image than meets the eye', in Patricia Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 14–18.

There are a number of themes that warrant closer analysis in this subgenre. Firstly, the link with horror and the female psychopath as monster, embodying both ancient and evolving fears of woman, in behaviour which, although obviously repellent, holds a certain appeal. Equally, however, these films uphold the traditions of melodrama, a fact rather neglected in criticisms of them. 'Women's concerns' such as relationships, children, the home and the domestic – traditionally the stuff of 'women's films' – become the arena where conflict is played out. In this way, these films can be seen as *horror for women*. Indeed, it is significant that all the films under analysis here also belong to the 'invasion-of-the-home' subgenre, the recent spate of thrillers where a malign invader threatens the sanctity of the home.<sup>4</sup>

The relationships between women in these texts are also of particular interest. Though these films frequently pit woman against woman (thus removing the emphasis on men as the source of women's oppression in an act of 'divide and rule'), the division between the women is not the simplistic battle between good woman/bad woman, virgin/whore, monster/victim that it may initially seem to be, but is in fact rather complex. The conflict between women in these films – or more fundamentally between 'oppositional' female functions and behaviour – can be seen as the external representation of the victim/wife's own internal battle. Indeed, this article is particularly concerned with the figure of the victim/wife, one who is essential to these films, yet who has been almost completely neglected in academic and popular accounts of them. By looking at the female psychopath and victim/wife as a symbiotic representation of the conflicts of womanhood, and by engaging with feminist and radical critiques of horror and melodrama, I intend to illustrate how these films can be appropriated from dominant ideology for a progressive feminist reading.

In *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against Women*, Susan Faludi makes a convincing case for the media's most recent covert war against feminism.<sup>5</sup> By playing on old stereotypes and contemporary fears, the media have managed to create a climate where the woman 'who wants it all' is asking for trouble. By creating myths, from the man shortage to the infertility epidemic to female burn-out, the media spent much of the 1980s undermining the progress made by the women's movement. Naturally this backlash was also attended by cinema, and in Faludi's words, '*Fatal Attraction* was the one that most mesmerised the media'.<sup>6</sup>

Faludi's critique of *Fatal Attraction* is representative of the popular feminist response to the film. She argues that Alex is a classic example of the unfulfilled career woman who would gladly shed her independence for a husband and family. In this moral tale, her alienation from the domestic is shown as largely responsible for her

4 Other examples of this genre include *Pacific Heights* (John Schlesinger, 1990), *Cape Fear* (Martin Scorsese, 1991) and *Unlawful Entry* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1992).

5 Susan Faludi, *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).

6 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

psychosis. Similarly, in *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* women are reminded of the inexcusability of foisting their childcare onto others. When Claire Bartel foolishly hires a nanny so that she can spend more time on her greenhouse project, her family are soon terrorized by the ensuing chaos. Again, *Single White Female* preys on the fears of the independent working girl. Susceptible to loneliness, Allie turns to female friendship for solace after she splits from her fiancé, and finds herself inviting a psychopath to rent the spare bedroom.

Looked at in this way, these films are indeed part of the backlash of the era in which they were made. They engage very clearly with the media myths that Faludi identifies, showing career women as paranoid or breaking down due to alienation from the familial, and childlessness is shown as a source of hysteria. However, it is not the project of this article to dedicate too much space to these now familiar criticisms. Rather, it will reevaluate the notion of the female psychopath as monster and attempt to salvage the significant space for women to identify or empathize with her. Furthermore, it seeks to address the glaring absence of the victim/wife in the criticisms. If she represents the ideal woman of the backlash, the faithful partner/mother and positive inverse of the psychopath, surely she too is vital to an understanding of these films.

In *The Monstrous-Feminine*, Barbara Creed persuasively argues that many of the classic faces of 'the monster' in the horror genre are inherently female/feminine in nature.<sup>7</sup> She lists these as variously 'the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire and the possessed woman', all of which evoke perpetual fears about the true nature of woman, her inherent deceitfulness and disquieting closeness to nature.<sup>8</sup> One can very easily see how these descriptions could indeed be applied to these female psychopaths. However, the aspect of Creed's analysis which is most crucial here is the notion of *the abject*.

'Abjection' is a term developed by Julia Kristeva to describe the border between order and presymbolic dis-order.<sup>9</sup> 'The abject' is all those things which threaten society's established boundaries, disturbing order or identity. Horror texts are particularly illustrative of a number of important features of the abject. Firstly, the idea that the abject is both repellent and fascinating. Secondly, the notion that the abject is always present; although horror films usually expel the abject by the ending, its existence has nevertheless been acknowledged and may indeed return. Thirdly, there is the idea of ritual, that the formulaic nature of horror exists as a tolerable means of exploring, and finally rejecting, the abject. Finally, there is the link between the feminine and the abject, both as configurations in opposition to the paternal symbolic, and through woman's unclean functions of menstruation and childbirth. In psychoanalytic terms, the 'return of the repressed' can be seen as something of a theoretical predecessor to Kristeva's concept of the abject and, indeed, it is a notion which is

7 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1993).

8 Ibid., p. 7.

9 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Robin Wood's analysis of US horror in the 1970s ('An introduction to the American horror film', in Bill Nichols [ed.], *Movies and Methods*, Volume II [London: University of California Press, 1985], pp. 195–220) is also interesting in this context. He suggests that the monster embodies the return of the repressed, in particular representing forms of sexuality that are intolerable in our society. In an approach similar to my understanding of the female psychopath thriller, he sees horror as characterized by its ambivalence, suggesting that the monster is rarely totally unsympathetic, and that spectatorial pleasure lies in the enactment of our secret desire to smash our norms.

essential to understanding women in these films, since women are a doubly repressed social group.

In the three films under discussion, Alex, Peyton and Hedy respectively clearly fulfil the function of monster and are thus the object of the films. But in the sense Kristeva has given it, the object is a space which threatens order and which holds a fascination for society almost despite itself. Thus, these films illustrate both the horror and appeal of the aggressive, violent, determined woman, and the potential destruction of the 'good' woman and family unit to reach a new order. As rituals, all the films must show that the threat posed by the female psychopath is finally defeated. But nevertheless, the desire for the object has been acknowledged and will be resurrected, since the object is never finally defeated; indeed, the object illustrates the fragility of dominant laws and taboo. In Kristeva's words: 'We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity'.<sup>10</sup> The border these films are concerned with exists on two levels. Firstly, there is a fairly traditional representation of woman as monstrous-feminine, embodying male fears. But there is also a more 'topical' border being explored: the border between the female psychopath and her positive inverse, problematizing female identity, in an exploration brought about by changes in gender roles and what constitutes acceptable female behaviour.

Therefore, the object here exists both in the perpetual sense of man's age-old fears of the 'true' nature of women and female bodies, and as the object of women in our culture. The female psychopath is woman's object since she crosses the borders other women are forced to maintain, lives out their fantasies about escaping their place in the symbolic, and, in her defeat at the end, represents women's necessary attempts to expel their desire for the object. If one looks at the female psychopath as the object of the victim/wife, then this particular monstrous woman can be seen as the embodiment of a female dilemma, an exploration and momentary enjoyment of conflicting roles and behaviour, rather than solely a reflection of male fears. As Kristeva says on the abjection of self:

One can understand that (the object) is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than object.<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning of *Fatal Attraction* there are indicators that all is not well in the Gallagher household. Although the preferred reading of the film demands that we warm to the family, the subtext is inherently critical of domestic tedium. The opening scenes of the family, despite the cosy familiarity, could be read as a vision of domestic *unbliss*.

<sup>10</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

12 Ellen Willis, 'Sins of the fathers',  
*Village Voice*, 15 December  
 1987, p. 85.

Dad sits unshaven, wearing his earphones, oblivious to his daughter consuming television; mum is in a flap, trying simultaneously to get dressed and clean Ellen's mess; and Ellen herself wanders to open the front door muttering 'Shit, shit, shit'. Underneath the superficial veneer of material success and bourgeois accomplishments lies a resounding air of emptiness. The film exposes its vision of the perfect family as a sham; as Alex pointedly says to Dan, 'If your life's so damn complete what were you doing with me?'. Dan is shown to be an ineffectual, rather bewildered figure, and as Ellen Willis notes, 'His dominant emotion is fear, not only of Close but of his wife'.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, one of the perverse pleasures of *Fatal Attraction* comes precisely in seeing the overwhelming niceness of the Gallagher family life disrupted and revealed as dangerously precarious, as we secretly enjoy their discomfort before order is once more 'restored'. Similarly, in all these films there is abject pleasure to be had in seeing the rather dull ideal woman, the victim/wife, given a figurative or literal shaking. If Beth is the film's ideal woman, there is certainly much left to be desired in the depiction of her life which, whilst comfortable, is in many ways as empty as Alex's. She has no interests outside homemaking, no friends of her own, and she seems to fill her days decorating and waiting for her family to return home. Whilst many critics have expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of objectivity attributed to Alex, very few have criticized Beth's similar positioning. The 'ideals' of the film – the family and the 'good woman' – in many ways fail to ring true.

Initially, at least, there is every likelihood that many women might warm to Alex equally or more so than to Beth; at first for her success and professional standing and later for the rejection she suffers, a fluctuating move from admiration to empathy. Although it is true that Alex becomes so manic that the space for sympathy with her is systematically eradicated (a necessary process for the abject to be expelled before the end of the ritual), Barbara Creed's suggestion that Alex becomes a ridiculous figure 'rejected by female members of the audience' because 'she can't get a man', is a misguided one.<sup>13</sup> In fact, although Alex embodies male fears, she also acts out female rage in behaviour which, while repellent, often has a certain clandestine appeal.

Alex and Beth are obviously drawn to be contrasting, opposing faces of womanhood as contemporary patriarchy perceives it; the warm earth mother versus the cold professional woman. Significantly, however, as the film progresses and Alex's behaviour becomes increasingly threatening and manic, the two women become closer rather than more polar. The initial apparent gulf between them in many ways begins to close. Dan is appalled to see Alex quite at home in *his* home; the scene when he walks into the lounge to find Alex having tea with his wife thoroughly alarms him. Although he is obviously scared at the thought that she will tell his wife about their

13 Barbara Creed, *Cinema Papers*,  
 no. 68 (1988), p. 43.

Glenn Close, Michael Douglas  
and Anne Archer in *Fatal  
Attraction* (Paramount), Picture  
courtesy: BFI Stills.



affair, perhaps he is equally shocked to see the femme fatale able to commute so easily into the realm of domesticity. This scene is also significant in the possibility it allows for the two women to communicate. As they converse with ease, clearly, and again frighteningly for Dan, they are able to get on with one another. When Dan sits listening to the tape of Alex's disembodied tirade against him ('You probably don't even like girls do you? They probably scare you. Well I know I do . . . you're fucking frightened of me . . . you deserve everything you get!'), it is *Beth* who appears beside him and makes him jump. Later, Alex visits their daughter and persuades her to come for a trip after school. Perhaps she is not the monster Dan thought if she is able to befriend not just Beth, but their little girl. Ellen Willis identifies the significance of this scene exactly when she says:

In a way [Alex's] most terrifying move is to pick up Douglas's daughter at school and take her for a roller-coaster ride . . . metaphorically it gets to the heart of the matter. Once all the boundaries are blurred, Close could be your wife, the mother of your child. The invasion of the body-snatchers comes home.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Willis, 'Sins of the fathers',  
p. 85

Obviously, killing Ellen's rabbit is a completely anti-maternal act, yet in befriending her later, Alex effectively proves her ability to merge into what Dan had assumed to be her opposing, incompatible female role.

On the other side of the equation, Beth becomes stronger, more assertive, more violent and thus *monstrous* as the drama unfolds. She flies at Dan in a rage when he confesses to the affair. No longer the ideal mother, she traumatizes their daughter and ejects the paternal presence from the home. She chillingly and unhesitatingly tells Alex, 'If you ever come near my family again I'll kill you', and indeed at the end of the film, after a vicious fight in the bathroom, it is left to

15 As Wood notes, when he argues that the variable of the relationship between normality and the monster constitutes the essential subject of the horror film: 'The relationship has one privileged form, *the figure of the doppelgänger*, alter ego, or double, a figure that has recurred constantly in Western culture ... [revealing] the monster as normality's shadow' (emphasis mine). Wood, 'An introduction to the American horror film', p. 204.

her to coolly fire a bullet into Alex. It is in the bathroom that their parallelism is most obvious, when Beth looks in the mirror and sees *Alex's* face. Both dressed in stark white, the two form a symmetry and, indeed, it is significant that it is after this exchange of looks, when her identity has been so explicitly problematized, that Beth must expel the abject and kill Alex. They have clearly come to inhabit each other's place, with Alex pointedly asking Beth, 'What are you doing here, why are you here?'. Obviously, a misogynist reading could see this fluidity as further evidence of woman's inherent deceit and her chameleon nature. But, in fact, this doubling and borrowing of roles is a crucial element of the film, the idea of the doppelgänger being a traditional motif of horror, which problematizes the easy delineation of the women as monster and victim.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the threat to the family is never merely external, but also an *internal* one.

In all these films it is important to ask what is defeated or expelled at the end. Arguably, it is not just an external threat that has been eradicated, but the victim/wife's internal abject that has been waylaid. The abject *draws attention* to the precarious nature of the symbolic order; the female psychopath can be read positively in that she *instigates change* or awareness in her female counterpart. She highlights the instability of the domestic and the precarious nature of the roles society has assigned to other women; she is a catalyst who forces them to confront their unhappiness or dissatisfaction. Of course, the films all show the female psychopath as dead and defeated at the end, but it is in the nature of ritual that having renewed contact with the abject, it must be excluded once more. More significantly, it is the nature of the abject to return.

In *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* the assault on the family reaches grandiose proportions. This section will look particularly at how the film engages with the idea of both the hysterical woman and melodrama, and argue that progressive readings of these two concepts can also be used to appropriate an oppositional understanding of this film.

After pregnant young mother Claire Bartel reports her gynaecologist for assaulting her during an examination, he commits suicide. The shock causes his pregnant wife to miscarry and suffer an emergency hysterectomy. Months later, his widow re-emerges, calling herself Peyton Flanders (a pseudonym clearly evoking melodramatic excess), and infiltrates the Bartel home as a seemingly angelic nanny. Before long, she has driven a wedge between Claire and her husband and daughter, secretly started breast feeding baby Joe, framed the mentally disabled handyman for sexual abuse, murdered Claire's best friend Marlene, and generally driven Claire to distraction. Peyton is a complex character in that she is both a dedicated maternal figure and a raging threat to the family. Like Alex, she fluctuates between the

manic and the domesticated. In fact, it is vital to the film that Peyton be seen as schizophrenic, as indeed the notion of the 'split woman' or divided self is crucial to my analysis of these films, since the schizophrenic woman is the logical successor to the *fin de siècle* notion of the hysterical woman. She stands for alienation and fragmentation, the inability of women to cope with the demands of the feminine role in a patriarchal society.

Initially, Peyton is a sympathetic figure since she is a *barren woman*, a figuration subsequently perverted to signify her as psychotic. The barren woman is an enduring object of interest in our culture, one who evokes sympathy for having lost her essentially female capacity to reproduce, but one who also evokes fear for precisely the same reason. Thus, Peyton can be seen to be marked as doubly abject; she has crossed the border of sexual difference, entered an ambiguous gender territory as a woman who is not a woman. She also represents Claire's abject because her hysterectomy is a symbolic escape from the familial and the female reproductive function. That said, the film clearly suggests that Peyton's inability to have children, the loss of her womb, results in mental illness, and indeed the association between female madness and the womb is a perennial one. In fact, both Peyton and Claire are linked to puerperal disorder and figured as 'hysterical' women: Peyton because she is disbarred from the familial, and Claire, crucially, because of her immersion in it. In exploring this, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* draws consistently on Victorian conceptions of women and mental breakdown, motifs which further underlie its melodramatic feel. The psychiatric profession of the Victorian era perceived mental illness in women as being inextricably linked to their feminine nature, female bodies and reproductive functions, rather than their social context. Similarly, Claire's husband and those around her fail to recognize the root causes of her discontent, misdiagnosing her as suffering from an overactive imagination.

That Claire is to be perceived as a *fin de siècle* woman is made obvious from the earliest scene of her preparing breakfast. Her place is clearly in the home, and she is the pivotal element in its warm environment. But this scene also introduces the idea of her nervousness, self-doubt and hysteria when she sees Solomon for the first time in the garden, and drops a jug in alarm. Other than being a housewife, Claire's most characteristic feature is that she is asthmatic. Lizzie Francke has come close to understanding the significance of this, noting the 'echo of the Victorian consumptive heroine'.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Claire's asthma can be seen as an early indication of hysteria. Victorian medicine saw hysteria and similarly neurasthenia as essentially feminine nervous conditions, the two defining characteristics of hysteria being seizure and the *globus hystericus*, or the sensation of choking.<sup>17</sup> There is a clear parallel between this notion and that of Claire as an asthmatic, continually gasping for breath, a

16 Lizzie Francke, *Sight and Sound*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1992), p. 51.

17 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 130.

motif linking her to this specific historical understanding of woman.

After Peyton moves in and begins her tricks, Claire's hysterical symptoms accordingly escalate. She appears to be suffering from delusions – believing her husband is having an affair, accusing Solomon of child abuse and descending into depression – although, in fact, Peyton has deceived her every time. In a classic image of melancholia she sits alone weeping in her chair, alienated from her children and husband. In many ways, then, Claire's hysteria is an image of female weakness. She is not an agent in her own fate, she is powerless and victimized. But the hysteria imagery can also be read positively, since the root cause of Claire's hysteria is her position in the home. She is isolated and unfulfilled, and unable properly to articulate her feelings; like Peyton's rages, Claire's hysteria can be understood as another displaced representation of this dissatisfaction.

Rather than confirming that women are happiest at home, the film shows that now, as in Victorian times, women's immersion in the domestic can be unsatisfying and dangerous. Claire is a perfect example of the American housewife overcome by alienation and ennui, evoked so vividly by Betty Friedan three decades ago in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>18</sup> If this film can be seen within dominant ideology as part of the current 'backlash', replicating quite precisely what Friedan identifies as the postwar campaign to get women back into the home, almost in spite of itself it also evokes an image of the housewife as despairing and depressed. Indeed, Solomon's initial job for the family is to build a new fence, 'mostly to keep people out', an early indicator that Claire is effectively isolated within the home. If we accept that Claire's confinement within the family is the real cause of her hysteria, then Peyton can be seen as the abject within Claire, systematically breaking up her family.

Peyton's obsessive behaviour comes from having internalized this female role so strongly, and she can be understood more positively through the notion of 'femininity as masquerade'. Our first glimpse of her shows her as cool, self-assured and power-dressed at a meeting with lawyers. By the time she has reached the Bartel home she has assumed a passive, self-deprecating manner, a girlish hairstyle and a sensible, unassuming pastel wardrobe. It seems, then, that her image as Peyton Flanders is one she 'wears', accentuating the artificiality of femininity as a kind of performance. In the 1920s, psychoanalyst Joan Riviere described 'womanliness as masquerade' as the exaggeration of femininity by some women in an unconscious defence mechanism.<sup>19</sup> Feminist film theorists have since appropriated this notion as an act of resistance; Mary Ann Doane suggests that masquerading problematizes the cultural construction of femininity by revealing its artifice.<sup>20</sup> That Peyton's excessive womanliness as the family nanny is a *performance* can be seen in her occasional outbursts of rage, when the mask

18 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

19 Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as masquerade' (1929), in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35–44.

20 Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the masquerade: theorising the female spectator', *Screen*, vol. 23, nos 3–4 (1982), p. 81. See also Claire Johnston, 'Femininity and the masquerade: Anne of the Indies', in Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen (eds), *Jacques Tourneur* (London: British Film Institute, 1975).

momentarily slips and we see the anger beneath, for example, when she smashes the toilets at the botanical gardens. Of course, within the preferred reading of the film Peyton's womanliness as nanny is desirable, but since we know she is acting and has adopted her role as a disguise, there is significant space to interpret her performance as exposing the construction of femininity as essentially fake.

As with *Fatal Attraction*, the dominant reading of the film is that we fear for the family and are relieved to see it survive intact. It is significant that the only character to die as a result of Peyton's campaign, other than Peyton herself, is Marlene who, with her cigarettes, red lipstick, high-flying career and blunt, aggressive manner, is clearly the kind of 'eighties woman' the backlash most feared. But Claire's hysteria can, in fact, be read as an act of more subdued rebellion, within the limitations of her environment and the forms of protest open to her. Feminist critics like Showalter and Phyllis Chesler have shown how the female hysterics of the Victorian era can be seen positively as making a protest, however doomed or desperate, against the confinements of femininity.<sup>21</sup> As a woman within this tradition, Claire's physical frailty, asthma, paranoia and depression are expressions of far more than a throwaway character in a reactionary film.

The centrality of the family and the identifiable presence of 'hysteria' in this text clearly link it to the melodramatic form which, with its characteristic moments of high drama and mood shifts, exhibits hysteria in its very foundations. *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* features many of the conventions of melodrama, such as the persecuted woman, false identities, secret pasts, exposes, the detailed and materially sumptuous mise-en-scene of the home, and so on. But, like *Fatal Attraction*, the superficial vision of home comforts has an undercurrent of discontent; indeed, Thomas Elsaesser has argued that the essential shallowness beneath the array of possessions in the middle-class home is one of the potentially most subversive aspects of melodrama.<sup>22</sup>

Progressive readings of the melodrama, which stress the ambivalent attitude of melodrama to the family, support the case for reading the female psychopath thriller as being similarly polysemic. Elsaesser suggests that although melodrama's preoccupation with the family may seem to suggest conservative interests, actually it explores the tensions and emotions that belie this institution.<sup>23</sup> Melodrama forms an inherent critique of dominant ideology, since difficult issues are not resolved but shown as inherently contradictory, frequently through characters who break down under the pressure to observe social convention. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has argued that hysteria, or the return of the repressed, is not spoken, but displaced, in melodrama, emerging in its lavish mise-en-scene and stirring music.<sup>24</sup> If it is the 'excess' of melodrama that has at least partially enabled its appropriation as a potentially subversive form, then the excess of the

21 Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989); Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 5. However, as Showalter notes, feminist criticism should avoid romanticizing or endorsing female madness 'as a desirable form of rebellion' but rather acknowledge it as 'the desperate communication of the powerless'.

22 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, Volume II, pp. 182–3.

23 Ibid., pp. 166–89.

24 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minelli and melodrama', in Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, Volume II, p. 193.

female psychopath figure offers similar possibilities. Linking melodrama specifically to hysteria, Nowell-Smith notes:

The mechanism here is strikingly similar to that of the psychopathology of hysteria. In hysteria (and specifically what Freud has designated as 'conversion hysteria') the energy attached to an idea that has been repressed returns converted into a bodily symptom.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 193–4.

He goes on to conclude that melodrama opens up problems that it cannot accommodate, that issues are not contained by the text but rather 'laid open in their shameless contradictoriness'. Even the happy ending, the apparent defeat of the abject, can be seen as a superficial one, and the finale of *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* can be read ironically rather than literally. Claire fights back and pushes Peyton out of the window, impaling her on the white picket fence that was, after all, meant to keep people out. In this way the abject is 'defeated' by an enduring symbol of the middle-class American home, ironically rendered violent and murderous. And significantly, although the final scenes of the film may seem to imply the reinstatement of the sanctity of the family, the final image of them is incomplete, since Michael is absent from the dramatic ending, lying helpless in the cellar. Instead, his place as protector of the family is amply filled by the black, mentally disabled handyman, who rather tellingly, within the film's significations, is not a 'man' at all.

Of the films discussed here, *Single White Female* is the text which most self-consciously uses the doppelgänger motif and the notion of psychopath and victim as symbiotic. This section will look at the ways *Single White Female* mobilizes these themes and to what ends, particularly considering the film within the (largely literary) tradition of the female gothic. This is a genre which condenses many of the links already drawn between the woman's film, horror and melodrama, and one which has also been appropriated from dominant ideology by feminist criticism.<sup>26</sup> Prior to this reevaluation, the female gothic had usually been criticized on a very superficial level as rather reactionary, romantic, escapist nonsense for women, ignoring or misinterpreting the disturbing imagery and the subtext of dissatisfaction and anxiety felt by female characters.

The film's drama is instigated when, after discovering her boyfriend Sam's infidelity, Allie advertises for a new flatmate. As it states on the back cover of the video:

When mousy Hedra Carlson moves in, she doesn't just take over Allie's spare bedroom. She takes over her clothes, her boyfriend, her identity . . . and then tries to take her life. Before Allie's eyes,

<sup>26</sup> See Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

28 Hedra's name also seems to allude to *Hydra*, a mythological monster which had multiple heads, and which may be understood metaphorically here as inferring Hedy's multiple identities.

29 Barbet Schroeder, Interview with Fred Schruers, *Premiere* (US), vol. 6, no. 1 (1992), p. 120.

30 John Lutz, *SWF Seeks Same* (London: Signet, 1993).

31 Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p. 20.

Hedra makes a startling transformation – the perfect room mate becomes the perfect nightmare.<sup>27</sup>

This succinct description illustrates many of the symptoms of female paranoia which are crucial to the female gothic. The heroine's identity is problematized, she believes she has been deceived by those around her, and the home and those in it become the site of menace. In a gradual process, as Hedy begins to mimic, emulate and infringe on Allie's role, they start to become almost indistinguishable and indeed, just as *hedera* is Latin for ivy, Hedy becomes a kind of clinging dependent.<sup>28</sup> In what the director Barbet Schroeder describes as a 'symphony of mirrors',<sup>29</sup> there is constant play with the women's reflections, emphasizing their interchangeability and increasing closeness. (Significantly, the John Lutz novel on which the film is based is titled *SWF Seeks Same*.)<sup>30</sup>

This recurrent motif immediately links the film to the female gothic, since the notion of possession, the female doppelganger and the general air of the *unheimlich*, are among the genre's crucial elements. Dominant ideology attempts to pose the association between woman and the notion of 'doubling' or duplicity as natural. This is at least partly because women are made to exist in a state of dissemblance, and are enduringly associated with the virgin/whore dichotomy. It is because of this that the feminist appropriation of the double is such an important act of critical resistance.

The pre-credit sequence of *Single White Female* immediately indicates the importance of 'the double' as a theme when we see faded footage of young girl twins playing. We later discover that this is the young Hedy and her dead twin sister. The film suggests that Hedy's obsessive behaviour towards Allie is driven by a desire to recreate the relationship with her sister. However, critics have failed to point to the significance of the fact that the twins are seen *making up*, playing with cosmetics in the bathroom. This is an early indication that the theme of femininity as masquerade is present once more. The girls are learning to construct themselves as women, a skill on which Hedy will continue to draw as she leads her nomadic, chameleon-like existence.

From this image of the twins, the film moves to an establishing shot of an apartment block, a huge, imposing mansion suggesting the gothic imagination, a home which is utterly *unheimlich*. Modleski notes that the female gothic:

Expresses women's most intimate fears, or, more precisely, their fears about intimacy – about the exceedingly private even claustrophobic nature of their existence. So it is that the house, the building itself, to which women are generally confined in real life, becomes the locus of evil.<sup>31</sup>

Significantly, then, over this image of the gothic mansion, in the first

line of dialogue, Sam asks Allie, 'So how many kids do we want?'. As the return of the repressed, Hedy disrupts this vision, posing the potential formation of a new kind of relationship or female family. Sam and Allie are introduced by the film as a pair of romantics, discussing their wedding plans, but this is also another indicator of the subtext of gothic menace, since in the female gothic the heroine is typically a young woman either on the brink of marriage or a newlywed. The horror that follows for Allie – the discovery of Sam's infidelity, Hedy's disturbing behaviour, Sam's murder, the vicious destruction of Hedy – can be interpreted again as the external representation of Allie's anxieties, particularly of her inner conflict over the relationship she is entering into. When Hedy later kills Sam, this can be seen as Allie's revenge fantasy, a displaced punishment for his infidelity. Significantly, she kills him dressed in Allie's clothes, and when Allie tries to reason with her, saying 'You weren't yourself when you did this', she replies simply 'No, I was you'. As she later tells Allie, 'Everything I did I did for you. When you hated someone I hated them.'

The female doppelganger in the female gothic frequently exists as the presence of a woman from the past, perhaps the man's previous wife or lover, or a malign older woman, who emerges in some sense to haunt the victim and is an expression of her divided/multiple self/selves. This 'female foil' is a significant character, even in her absence, since she is frequently evoked as domineering, manipulative and overtly sexual, in contrast to the passive, innocent, confused heroine. In *Single White Female*, rather than the mysterious woman from the past, there is Hedy, the ambiguous woman from the present. The film resituates the women's relationship as the key element of interest, and complicates the position of the spectator by merging their identities and disintegrating the boundaries between the heroine and her female foil. This is done most obviously, as noted above, in visual terms: the mirror images, the borrowing of clothes, the shopping trips where both choose the same things, their identical hairstyles. But it is also done on a more subliminal level; one gradually realizes the two are in many ways personally similar, and there is a sense that Allie, despite initially being the 'light twin', the one to whom we are obviously meant to warm, is not a very likeable heroine. In fact, she is frequently smug, sulky and selfish. Interestingly, it is Allie who initiates suspicious and predatory behaviour by snooping around Hedy's room, borrowing her perfume and trying on her jewellery without permission. The film suggests that Allie is not the first woman to suffer at Hedy's hands, but, significantly, it also implies that Allie has had similar 'victims' before. It is never divulged exactly what caused Allie and her previous flatmate/business partner to fall out, but, as she says rather ominously, 'It wasn't a friendly split'.

Clothes, makeup, hairstyles and accessories, all take on huge significance in the film, and within the female gothic as a whole, as

the stuff that women use to construct their identities. Sybil Korff Vincent suggests that:

The peculiarly female perspective of the female Gothic is demonstrated by its setting and attention to detail . . . female achievement often depends on mastery of such details. . . . Identity is gained through things.<sup>32</sup>

When Hedy moves in on Allie's territory by copying her tastes, Allie is irritated and disturbed. The attention the film pays to the superficial details of femininity works like 'the masquerade' to highlight its artificiality. By showing the ultimate failure of Hedy's attempts to be closer to Allie and become more like her by copying her style, the film illustrates the futility of this notion of the construction of femininity.

As the female foil, Hedy still represents the unacceptable face of femininity which must be defeated. As the abject she must be expelled, destroyed for her symbolic castration of the men she attacks, her violence and, particularly, her sexual excess. Hedy represents deviant female sexuality, taking an aggressive sexual role when she performs oral sex on Sam, for her suggestion of lesbian desire and for masturbating. While the film must ultimately show her as unbalanced, and she must be punished for this, it also exhibits fascination and abject pleasure in her sexuality. Allie is both captivated and disturbed when, spying on Hedy one night, she finds her masturbating. When Hedy performs oral sex on Sam, pretending to be Allie, she instigates an interesting element of gender role reversal. Realizing he has been tricked, he curls up with the covers protecting him (mirroring the scene when Allie hears his wife discuss their lovemaking on the phone), looking confused and abused, perhaps momentarily feeling something of the subjection he put his ex-wife and Allie through. The actor Steven Weber, who plays Sam, perceptively commented, 'I have the traditional female role – I prance around naked and then get killed after sex'.<sup>33</sup>

Although Schroeder denies that any lesbian implications were intended,<sup>34</sup> Hedy continually showers and undresses in front of Allie, showing an openness and ease about her naked body that Allie does not share as she looks away, embarrassed. The film clearly indicates that Hedy's open sexuality is further evidence of her psychopathology, yet a progressive reading demands the recuperation of Hedy's behaviour as a rejection of the passive, inhibited, female sexual role which patriarchal society assigns to women. Later, it is by kissing her, by acknowledging desire, that Allie stops Hedy from cutting her throat and saves her own life. Indeed, Hedy says of Allie, 'I never met anyone so scared of being a woman'.

Many reviewers expressed disappointment with the film's ending, which becomes an increasingly more improbable and overdrawn scenario. However, the descent into the hellish depths of the basement,

<sup>32</sup> Sybil Korff Vincent, 'The mirror and the cameo', in Juliann E. Fleenor (ed.), *The Female Gothic* (London: Eden Press, 1983), p. 156.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Weber, *Interview*, vol. 22, no. 8 (1992), p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in an interview with John Lyttle, 'A singular white male', *The Independent*, 13 January 1992, p. 26. When asked about the lesbian content of the film Schroeder comments: 'No, no, it was completely innocent. Completely innocent. I did not, did not try to put an idea of sexual desire between them, no.'

complete with rats, meat hooks and furnace, can be read more positively in the context of the *mise-en-scène* of melodrama, as a representation of displaced hysteria. Allie tells Hedy, 'I'm the strong sister now', and after a long, violent battle, kills her. In the final scenes, we see that Allie is building a new life. She has moved to a new apartment (significantly, the one that Sam had said they shouldn't take) and she is learning to live alone. At one point Hedy tells Allie, 'I saved you', and perhaps that is one of the best ways to understand the film. Through surviving her ordeal, Allie has escaped containment within the family, avoided marriage to an unfaithful partner, overcome sexual harassment, confronted female sexuality and, arguably, started to overcome her fear of being alone. Again, the female psychopath can be seen to have instigated some element of change, encouraging self-awareness or assertiveness. Allie's final speech is an ambiguous one. 'I try to do what she couldn't. Forgive myself. I know what can happen to somebody who doesn't.' But what exactly is she trying to forgive herself for? For killing Hedy? Or for trying to repress in herself what Hedy represented? The film offers no conclusive answer, an irresolution analogous to the recurring nature of the abject.

In the last decade, the female psychopath genre has become a familiar one, but has received very little serious critical attention. Arguably, it has been deemed unworthy of prolonged critical attention, precisely because the films initially seem to be so bogged down in a reactionary, dichotomous purview of women. This article has shown how superficial this conception of the female psychopath figure is, and has given these films the kind of sustained analysis that their representation of women, and indeed their popularity, demands.

Linked to this is the second paradigm of this article, namely that my analysis should be understood as part of the feminist methodological tradition of 'appropriation'. It has avoided claiming that there are any deliberately progressive or feminist intentions in the films under analysis, frequently acknowledging that their preferred reading is largely reactionary. However, appropriation demands that one recovers moments of resistance and disruption for an alternative reading, moments that are plentiful in the excess of the female psychopath.

Despite its shortcomings, appropriation is a vital feminist tool. Firstly, it seeks to account affirmatively for the popularity of apparently reactionary texts with women. Secondly, it recognizes that popular culture should not be lightly dismissed. This basic observation is actually a key one, since within binary opposition, 'high' art, which carries high cultural prestige, is male. Texts of feminist appropriation are important precisely because they confront the circular issue of whether 'female' genres such as romances and soap opera are consumed by women because they have low cultural value and therefore do not make any intellectual demands, or alternatively, that

they are held in low cultural esteem *because* they are consumed by women. There is nothing inherently marginal about the 'female concerns' these films look at; it is only that our culture has designated them marginal. Thus, the act of appropriation itself is an act of resistance.

Elaine Showalter eloquently describes the value of this kind of approach when she says:

In the purest feminist literary criticism we are (presented) with a radical alteration of our vision, a demand that we see meaning in what has previously been empty space. The orthodox plot recedes and another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint.<sup>35</sup>

In the films examined above, it is the submerged anxieties of Beth, Claire and Allie that have been previously overlooked as the hidden female plot – the plot recovered in this analysis and brought to the fore in order to better understand both the victim/wife and the female psychopath. In uncovering this reading, one does have first to overcome a great deal of thoroughly 'orthodox' material; but through using Kristeva's concept of the abject, and psychoanalytic and feminist critiques of other genres such as horror, melodrama and the female gothic, my analysis has shown that there is significant space for resistance in these films. This space can and should be claimed by feminist criticism as indicative of the contradictions surrounding women's positioning within dominant ideology, and savoured for the oppositional pleasures it affords. As Modleski puts it: 'The price that women pay for their popular entertainment is high, but they may still be getting more than anyone bargained for'.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p. 25. Elaine Showalter, 'Review essay: literary criticism', *Signs* 1 (1975), p. 435.

<sup>36</sup> Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p. 34.

# 'I hope you're enjoying your party': MTV in wartorn Bosnia

LIDA HUJIC

*'Where are you from?'*

*'Yugoslavia.'*

*'Is there any such country?'*

*'No, but it's still where I come from.'*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quotation taken from Zdenko Lesic (ed.), *Children of Atlantis* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995), back cover.

In 1995, a Benetton shop opened in Sarajevo. Many people were astounded by this event. In a divided town where everything is grey from ashes and red from blood, who needs the 'united colours'? Although this question stems from a genuine concern for people who have no means to buy food, let alone fashion, it is, none the less, inappropriate. As a matter of fact, it might even be taken as an insult by a Sarajevan.

The concern of this paper is to explain why good intentions can sometimes be misread. After four years of war reports from the front line, the main signifiers of the Bosnian tragedy became precisely 'grey' or 'red'. Sights of death and destruction formed popular sentiment towards the crisis. In an article in *The Guardian* in January 1996 about how media reporting had distorted British teenagers' views of the conflict, this was a typical comment: 'Their clothes . . . are probably from corpses or from charities' and 'most people live in small shacks made from scraps of metal and other things they can find'.<sup>2</sup> The reaction to this attitude was summed up in the words of a girl from Sarajevo: 'They're just showing that we are so poor and pitiful, and they are so good. They don't need to tell us that they are sorry, and that we are living in a war. We know everything about us.'

<sup>2</sup> Shaun Waterman, 'Between the lines', *Guardian Education*, 16 January 1996, p. 6.

3 Ibid.

They need to tell us what's happening in the world and about their lives.'<sup>3</sup>

This paper attempts to clarify this misunderstanding by focusing on a neglected side of the conflict. A case-study of MTV in Bosnia helps highlight the problem of entertainment in war. At the same time, it raises questions about contemporary popular culture which are often ignored.

In order to establish the link between MTV and the conflict in Bosnia and understand its significance, it is necessary to examine the overall policy of MTV Europe. In doing so, there are two main aspects to consider: the youth market and its pan-European potential.

4 Phrase taken from Brent Hansen's speech to the Youth Marketing Conference, WORM, the Royal College of Art, London, 15 September 1995. Hansen is President and Creative Director, MTV Networks for Europe.

5 Ibid.

6 Charlotte Brundson and David Morley, *Everyday Television: Nationwide* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 43.

7 John Morey, *The Spaces between Programmes: TV Continuity* (London: Comedia, 1981), pp. 1, 2, 21.

### The youth market: 'nothing is constant except change'<sup>4</sup>

MTV's approach to youth was the key to its success. It was designed as television for a lifestyle which acknowledged the changing trends that young people followed. As Brent Hansen points out: 'We believe the most important aspect of MTV Europe is the dynamic environment which we create. More than the programmes, more than the video clips, it is the channel as a whole which has become a barometer of popular culture.'<sup>5</sup>

To understand MTV as a cultural phenomenon is to understand its specific mode of address. Central to the production of its discourse are two main strategies. Firstly, to set everything into MTV's context. Secondly, to develop an ambiguous outlook in order to maximize appeal. MTV 'has its own take on the topic . . . it does not simply transmit items, it constructs itself as a very specific kind of discourse'.<sup>6</sup> The channel invested a considerable amount of creative effort and money into legitimizing what appear to be peripheral to the experience of watching television: continuity sequences. With the emergence of MTV, these went from being essentially ephemera right into the spotlight. MTV maximized their potential in structuring 'the relationship with the audience to maximum self-advantage, employing particular formal conventions composed to avoid discomforting, puzzling or otherwise alienating an audience which had been made familiar with a certain set of codes, a naturalized system of practices and house styles'.<sup>7</sup>

MTV's idents and trailers have their own metatextual mode of operation which compose MTV's self-conscious and self-reflexive discourse. They are designed to be experienced as an indispensable part of the channel creating a context for other programme items to fit into, be these a music video, a 'substantial' show or an advertisement. However, rather than a series of separate items, MTV is experienced as an 'environment'. Through sequences, a fashionable image of the MTV audience is narcissistically offered as a desirable point of

identification. It is on the conception of the channel identity that MTV builds its viewer loyalty.

Furthermore, MTV employs a tactic also common in music videos: 'an attempt to construct a mass market by playing upon confusions about critical distance, so as to generate simultaneously two sets of images that can be read both innocently and self-consciously'.<sup>8</sup> This 'double image' tactic allows MTV to be what it represents today: a point of identification and a teenage dream factory. There are three instances of the double image: the 'modest' versus the 'glamorous', the 'ordinary' versus the 'star' and the 'serious' versus the 'playful'. It is the third example which needs highlighting in the Bosnian context.

The 'playful' and the 'serious' are seen in two discourses on the channel. One is 'nihilistic, pastiching, essentially pointless playfulness'. The other is 'responsible, socially conscious, satire and parody'.<sup>9</sup> MTV incorporates both modes: 'No other channel presents innovative specials that articulate youngsters' views on the likes of music censorship, antismoking legislation, AIDS – and the issue of whether Slash, the lead guitarist for Guns 'N' Roses, should have his tattoo removed'.<sup>10</sup>

I want to show how MTV adapted this form of address for a war report. I will therefore concentrate on the 'some-things-are worth-taking-seriously' side of MTV that has been neglected by academics in favour of the 'nothing-matters-and-what-if-it-does?' world view so often attributed to it.

### The pan-European potential: 'celebration of diversities'<sup>11</sup>

Apart from reaching the traditionally out of reach, in Europe MTV has another task to perform. It has to appeal across a wide range of regional and cultural variations. Furthermore, there is the language barrier.

In order to avoid the language problem, a conscious decision was taken to not make language the most important part of MTV's message: visual communication took priority over dialogue. In addition, according to Tibor Kalman: 'conveniently enough, young people don't read any more. That means that images have become far more important ways of conveying ideas'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the channel's investment in image has two functions: firstly, to attract the viewer and, secondly, to send a message.

Nonetheless, there was still a need for a common denominator language. English was chosen, 'like a default',<sup>13</sup> yet MTV has a specific use of that language. As Toynbee argues: 'The English language is made to stand as a common European language'. As such, it is inflected by different accents, such that British intonation gets subsumed under the panglossian discourse of the schedule as a whole. It is no more than one among several regional variants. 'On MTV

8 Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 165.

9 Andrew Goodwin, 'Fatal distraction: MTV meets postmodern theory', in Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Sound and Vision* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 62.

10 Kevin Fedarko, 'MTV rocks Europe', *Time*, 29 March 1993, p. 62.

11 Phrase used by Brent Hansen, interview with the author, 18 August 1994.

12 Tibor Kalman, funding editor of *Colours* magazine, sponsored by Benneton, speaking at the WORM Conference.

13 Hansen, interview with the author, 18 August 1994.

14 Jason Toynbee, 'MTV and the making of the European fan', paper given at the European Routes Conference, Liverpool Institute of Popular Music, 19–21 March 1994.

15 Kalman, speaking at the WORM Conference.

16 Hansen, interview with the author.

17 Bundson and Morley, *Everyday Television: Nationwide*, p. 80.

18 Toynbee, 'MTV and the making of the European fan'.

Europe the Anglo-American axis in rock is pulled apart by the effacement of English as a transatlantic signifier. Rather, it becomes a universal language of youth and music.'<sup>14</sup>

With regard to cultural variations, the only way MTV Europe can function as a transnational television is by acknowledging differences. The question is, how do we deal with diversity? There are two methods, as Tibor Kalman observes: 'Here's one sure-fire method. It's done a great job in Sarajevo and it will do a great job in Rwanda, and it will keep going. Another popular method is just to sell them stuff, to smother the differences and to make people drink our stuff and wear our sweaters . . .'. However, here he makes the distinction between simply selling and selling 'with education', which implies a specific kind of marketing: 'It's about celebrating the differences between people and putting something back into the world . . . it's about nurturing the differences, about creating understanding and education about the differences, different cultures and different ideas . . .'.<sup>15</sup> In sum, it is about accepting different consumption cultures. MTV Europe generates this kind of thinking. It was conceived and developed as a 'celebration of diversities'.

MTV is constantly emphasizing the message: 'We're as local as you are and as international as you are'.<sup>16</sup> In order to explain this, MTV can be depicted by analogy with the British television news programme *Nationwide*. Within both programmes' discourses, 'the concept of the nation is not presented as a monolithic entity, immediately embracing us all – rather the unity of the nation is constructed out of the sum of our regional differences and variations'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, MTV's Europe is a combination of gaps and synergies; its constituents are equally European in their difference.

However, to define Europe as a relational entity is not sufficient. In order to account for the distinctive properties of the constructed European nation, there is a need to call upon a structure of opposition. In this case, it is the USA. As Toynbee argues: 'What is needed and what MTV supplies, is a sense of pan-European identity to replace the American symbolism in the rock imaginary'. This pan-European identity is visible through similarities between young Europeans. They are fluent in 'panglossian' English, they have a similar lifestyle and taste in music and clothes. They also share a common concern with European issues. Bosnia is the most extreme case where tragedy brought the audience together in common European filiation: 'something must be done here'.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the similarities, there is still variation in the appreciation of the channel: a diversity of celebration. The reaction to MTV significantly depends on the national context of consumption. My aim is to examine how the war in Bosnia affected the reception of MTV there.

In order to understand what MTV represents in wartorn Bosnia, it is necessary to reflect upon the period before the war. There are many reasons for the success of MTV in eastern Europe. Although of crucial importance, audience research and, consequently, a calculated approach towards the youth market were not the only parameters of MTV's success in most of the continent.

Firstly, it is essential to look at the context of production. The idea of MTV Europe was born at a particular time in history, the late 1980s, a time very favourable for ideas of European unification. For youth culture, the prospect of no boundaries not only meant more employment opportunities but also the end of the era of intolerance. The Berlin wall had fallen and the East–West dichotomy was a nightmare of the past. Furthermore, satellite and cable television were increasingly available, offering television with no frontiers.

Secondly, there were local factors dictating MTV's success in each territory: the strength of national feeling and the choice of programmes available on terrestrial television. In the countries where it was broadcast, neither was strong enough to resist MTV's conquest. In addition, in eastern Europe, there was a third contributory cause: 'how recently a territory tuned in'. By the time eastern youth gained access, westerners were already accustomed to MTV's image. In the East, where this was new, the reaction was hysterical. This type of television had never been seen before.

Furthermore, MTV was a sign of emancipation. It was free direct access to 'the West'. For the first time, eastern Europeans could be in tune with the latest music, fashion trends and information from the outside world. More importantly, thanks to MTV, not only were they able to follow trends, they too became members of the MTV community of fans. They were equal, at least symbolically – their consumer power could not actually match that of a western teenager. This, clearly, is another problem, but, nevertheless, with MTV came the first sense of freedom. As a matter of fact, MTV did not change the political system, but at a time of major changes it was the first available source of popular culture without communist censorship.

Although it was not part of the eastern bloc, the reaction in former Yugoslavia to MTV was similar. However, with the start of the war, MTV in Bosnia gained a whole new meaning. Mass destruction, previously unknown, changed popular perception of the channel. MTV became something different both for the young Bosnians watching it in the war zones, and for MTV itself, now being broadcast into an environment of buildings collapsing in fire.

Once, it was a simple desire to be trendy. In Bosnia today, the will to be part of MTV has turned into a desperate wish not to be left behind. Within a short period, MTV became what young people once had and

19 Hansen, interview with the author.

had now so suddenly lost. Yet to admit the loss would have been more devastating than the reality. Instead, Bosnians still think of themselves as members of the MTV community. 'In the country torn by war . . . MTV represents other people. It represents, kind of, people who should be mindful of what's going on in their situation.'<sup>19</sup> 'Other people' is MTV's community of European fans. Only now, this community is shaken by the sight of a major European tragedy.

As for MTV, it was confronted with the tension between its marketing imperative and a sense of moral responsibility. On the one hand, MTV invested heavily in making itself a forum for issues outside pop trivia. On the other, it constructed its Europe as a 'celebration of diversities'. Consequently, in order to live up to its image, it simply could not ignore the Bosnian 'local' issue.

Nevertheless, the crisis went beyond the scope of any entertainment channel. The matter had to be subtly expressed. As Brent Hansen rightly points out: 'That has to be somehow said there, without going into some kind of emotional overkill. . . . We're never going to stop the war, but we'll keep people mindful of that.'<sup>20</sup>

One could argue that in the context of Sarajevo reporting, the third strand of MTV's 'double image' is challenged. In any situation other than war, MTV's 'playful' as opposed to 'serious' discourse is acceptable. However, this is a more delicate matter than music censorship or Slash's tattoo. As a matter of fact, the 'playful' is replaced with the 'not so playful', while the 'serious' is 'much too serious'. Either way, the war had to be confronted. In order to face its responsibility, MTV took on the role of war reporter, which was not the channel's standard practice. This entailed a change in the mode of address. In its Bosnian reports, MTV still respected its 'double image' rules. However, its usual game of opposites was replaced by a concern to be 'mindful without emotional overkill'. This, in turn, was achieved by using two televisual techniques: real documentary was mixed with the MTV style.

The documentary-type footage fulfilled the 'mindful' part. Witnessing horrifying war scenes, viewers felt impelled to do something. These were combined with scenes of everyday life in the extraordinary environment of Sarajevo. The thought of people living in such atrocious conditions should have left viewers feeling upset. However, instead of pessimism, the image aroused hope. This is where the contribution of the MTV style is visible. Stereotypical war footage was edited into brief cut sequences, like any other feature on MTV. Sometimes, music beats were added to it. Otherwise, images simply spoke for themselves, with no music or voiceover. Furthermore, in the choice of items to avoid 'emotional overkill', the Sarajevo mise-en-scene itself became the documentary context. In the search for other than news-type footage, the situation on the ground led the camera. And here it found life. There were children playing, and singing the latest hits. There were young people going to

20 Ibid.

nightclubs. The environment was that of a war, but people themselves were very much alive.

The message became: 'there is still life in Sarajevo'. The spirit of the city is not killed. This was the important message which came across. Framed and linked into MTV's own environment, the message was encoded with a privileged reading. The interpretation of the items was full of optimism. This was partly due to the meta-language – it was, indeed, MTV's intention to show a cheerful war report. However, it was also a painful truth. War is two faced. Despite death, the immediate association which we take for granted when we watch the news, there is also life. And MTV's reports from Sarajevo were a celebration of life rather than footage of death. Instead of a news documentary, the 'Sarajevo Special' was presented as a version of an MTV 'rockumentary'. It was almost like a video.

There are two conclusions to be drawn here. Firstly, the alternative coverage of the war has its relevance for popular music. As Toynbee argues, Sarajevo can be seen as a rich *mise-en-scene* for rock narratives. In a reading of the Sarajevo reports as video clips: 'Sarajevo, however momentarily, constitutes a new site in the rock imaginary'. What we are seeing is possibly the prototype for a new rock imaginary, one which is unequivocally European, where the tension between the dream of a united continent is at risk of the nightmare of fragmentation and barbarousness. The cold war never provided symbolic material because it always remained a 'threat' or 'fantasy' of annihilation. However, in the case of the former Yugoslavia: 'European politics have a new materiality. Armed conflict, and its other – the possibility of reconstruction, now provide rock culture with a truly grandiloquent European reference for the first time.'<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, perhaps by pure coincidence, MTV succeeded in showing the neglected side of the war: people smiling and dancing. When life prevails over death, then the concern about Benetton's intentions becomes irrelevant. What matters is the gesture: to open a shop in Sarajevo. It might be in a war zone, but there are still people living in this town. If the majority cannot afford the items, the shop, none the less, gives them faith in a better future. Benetton is the first sign of stability and the slow return to normality. As the lone voice among British teenagers asks: 'Why shouldn't they want the same things as us?'<sup>22</sup>

What now remains is to try to explain why MTV coverage is important for young Bosnians living in a war zone, and why they pin as much hope on satellite links transmitted by MTV as on any charitable organization on the ground?

For many young Bosnians, MTV is an emotional refuge. It does not have any propaganda or nationalistic message in its statements. It does

21 Toynbee, 'MTV and the making of the European fan'.

22 Waterman, 'Between the lines'.

<sup>23</sup> Hansen, interview with the author.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, quoted in Toynebee, 'MTV and the making of the European fan'.

<sup>25</sup> MTV news report, 29 April 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Toynebee, 'MTV and the making of the European fan'.

not put up national flags. As Hansen explains: 'We still talk to people in Sarajevo and they know we're out there. We try to bring it up as often as possible, without trying to score any kind of ethical points on our behalf. 'Cause, it's kind of powerless, but, to a degree, we are attached. We are reality. To a lot of them, we are more reality than CNN.'<sup>23</sup>

When the voice of young Bosnians comes through MTV in live links, it is a chance for them to speak their mind. During the links, they take part in the MTV experience as equals. They watch the same programmes, listen to the same music and have the same haircuts. However, at the same time, they do not want other viewers to forget that young Bosnians only watch television when they have electricity. In their environment, banal things, which are normally taken for granted, are luxuries.

People in Bosnia are trying to make sense of everyday life. In times of senseless human tragedy and suffering, spiritual pleasures assume the same importance as biological needs. In this town, Lawrence Grossberg's 'rock culture organizes the mattering maps by which everyday life becomes navigable and hence liveable'<sup>24</sup> takes on a particular significance. Where human life has no more value, to live it as decently as possible becomes crucial. Thus, listening to music is as vital as eating, because, in Bosnian conditions, neither of those activities are normally fulfilled. There is no difference between keeping the physical body and the mind alive. This is best illustrated by the words of a young man from Mostar: 'Normal life is cinema. Normal life is a rock concert. Normal life is bread.'<sup>25</sup>

In Sarajevo, the will to make the quotidien liveable has a literal resonance: 'Rock culture organizes the minutiae of day to day survival'.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of circumstances, wherever there is life, life itself is a priority. The will to be alive has the same meaning anywhere. For every human being it implies love, hate, having fun, going to school, and so on. Perhaps, in war circumstances, the wish to enjoy every moment is even greater because death is so much closer. This is why in Bosnia it is not unusual to see a Guns 'N' Roses T-shirt on a youngster's tomb.

MTV exposed what could be characterized as the issue of 'sameness' which was lost in other news reports. At least, with regard to young people, there is no difference between them and the rest of Europe's youth. Footage of hungry and exhausted people, marching with bags containing all their belongings, is indeed one shocking side of the war. Having been forced to move, these people have lost their material possessions, but not their dignity. They are still individuals, although they are referred to collectively as refugees. This, for many, is hard to accept. When called a refugee in a camp, a young man replied: 'Fuck you, my name is Goran!'. Even if living conditions have changed, the majority of people have not. Girls are still beautiful. They wear makeup and like Bon Jovi, but somehow that seems to get

forgotten. This is not the kind of reality we see on the news, yet it exists.

However, on MTV this 'other' side prevails. Bosnians have their Miss Bosnia Contest. They even prepared for the Eurovision Song Contest. When possible, they continued to film their favourite comedy series. Humour is another means of survival. They are members of the 'civilized' Europe, although some people chose to follow the path of primitive destruction. Young Bosnians reach for MTV to show how 'normal' they are. Despite the war, they still wish to be in touch with the latest music or fashion. MTV is the dose of escapism necessary to live through the sad reality. It is food for the soul.

'I hope you're enjoying your party' are the words of a musician that ended the MTV satellite link with Sarajevo. They sum up the way MTV constructed Europe and how the Bosnians saw themselves within it.

Firstly, by saying 'your' party, the musician referred to all the viewers as portrayed by MTV: a bunch of young people who like to watch the channel because they share a similar taste in music, fashion and humour, and an interest in other more 'serious' issues. At the same time, they also have their national heroes and jokes which do not necessarily translate into other cultures. Nevertheless, they are all, the Bosnians included, equally European in their similarities and differences.

Yet Bosnians are only formally members of that community because their right to party, to freely do as they please, has been taken away. As Hansen remarks, '... while some watch MTV in a cafe in Amsterdam, this is a different scene, here. This is a life and death issue.'<sup>27</sup> Aware of this, the Bosnian musician consciously excluded himself from the party. He refused to accept the idea of a united Europe, in this case symbolized by MTV, only in terms of a party.

Europe is about sharing fun but also about sharing tragedy. There can be no Europe without all its members. If the special Bosnian report is simply one more feature, rather than a plea for help, then this musician would simply be grateful to the audience for listening, and then let them go back to their 'party' in which he has no wish to participate. On the other hand, if this programme will keep people mindful of the situation, then there is a chance of a better future. One can believe that more concrete help will be available once the fighting is over. The potential of a united Europe is still a dream that can come true after the nightmare.

The case of MTV in Bosnia raises questions about the role of popular culture in our society.

Firstly, MTV is not only an aesthetic issue. An analysis of its visual

27 Hansen, interview with the author.

discourse, no matter how attractive it is, does not fully account for the channel's properties. This can be explained by using the already mentioned example of the double image: the playful and the serious. MTV is often considered within the scope of entertainment and show-business excitement. This is an undeniable fact. However, the dominance of the playful in the approach fails to recognize the complexity of the phenomenon. One can acquire a proper understanding only if incorporating the other side as well.

Andrew Goodwin argues that the regular attempts on MTV to address sociopolitical topics articulate a point of view: 'The complicated factor here is the transformation, in the 1980s, of rock's counter-cultural ideology into a discourse that combines traditional notions of social responsibility and philanthropic concern'.<sup>28</sup> In short, despite their atypical mode of expression in comparison with traditional news reports, MTV's news features are none the less engaged. They function as a cultural symptom of rock's new centrality.

This duality has to be taken into account to realize the full potential of MTV. Kellner rightly points out that: 'media texts are neither merely vehicles of dominant ideology, nor pure and innocent entertainment. Rather they are complex artefacts that embody social and political discourses whose analysis and interpretations require methods of reading and critique that articulate their embeddedness in the political economy, social relations, and the political environment within which they are produced, circulated and received.'<sup>29</sup> And, furthermore, the gap between the 'serious' (traditional news) and 'entertainment' (MTV) is narrowing. This is true in the USA and is also visible in Europe. On the one hand, information programmes are increasingly incorporating trivial reports. For example, the break up of the British group Take That or the marriage and divorce of Michael Jackson, and similar items of pop gossip, now feature in television news bulletins. Some news networks, such as 'London Tonight', even have show-business correspondents. Moreover, characteristics attributed to channels like MTV are now being adopted by programmes which are considered informative: good-looking and glamorous newsreaders, humorous comments and chat among the presenters in the studio, friendly rapport with the viewer, and so on. On the other hand, MTV itself covers issues such as war, elections, racism and human rights.

Two conclusions may be drawn from this. Firstly, what is playful is not necessarily harmless. For example, in the former Yugoslavia the nationalist parties won the elections, and there is no question that going to the polls is 'serious'. However, a vote in itself was not sufficient for the new nationalism. People also needed to comply with certain rules. This meant emphasizing differences. Where people had lived in harmony for a long time, forgotten national signifiers from the past suddenly became indispensable. Thus, among the Serb

<sup>28</sup> Goodwin, 'Fatal distraction', p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 4.

community, there was an increased interest in 'gusle' music. Among the Muslims, many women started to cover themselves. Both gusle and veils existed before, but they were not so obviously used. They were either part of folklore or special ceremonies. The young urban generation neither listened to gusle nor wore veils. But now it was through playful signifiers, such as music or fashion, that harmful statements were made. We are all aware how far this stressing of differences went in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, for young people who refused to hate and fight, MTV became a means to express their disagreement. They, too, used music and fashion as a way of rejecting discrimination.

Secondly, the potential impact of the coverage of serious issues on MTV should not be neglected. For example, Clinton's electoral campaign on MTV US encouraged a considerable number of young people to express their opinions by exercising their democratic rights. In France, listeners to the commercial radio station NRJ came out on the streets to support its campaign against a governmental decision regarding private licences; they succeeded in keeping NRJ on air.<sup>30</sup> In eastern Germany, the rock industry became the key site for the management of cultural change.<sup>31</sup> In the last Russian elections, politicians involved western rock stars in their campaigns, using performances to boost their image. Alternatively, it is politicians who move out of their usual context. For example, in the UK, the leader of the Labour Party, Tony Blair, is regularly seen at ceremonies such as the 'Q Awards' or the 'Brits 1996'. At the latter event he even presented an award – a task traditionally performed by pop celebrities.

Finally, MTV's support of the Bosnian cause went beyond media coverage anyway. MTV is part of 'War Child', the charity raising money for a music conservatory in Mostar. The aim is to heal war trauma with music therapy. Perhaps, apart from contributing towards knowledge, this paper can also tempt scholars to take interest in an academic lifeline for Bosnia.<sup>32</sup>

I wish to thank my friend Brent for his time, my supervisor Dave Morley for his comments and Simon for editing this article. I am also grateful for my Department's material support for my attendance of the Screen Studies Conference 1995 (especially Valerie W. and Dave M.).

<sup>30</sup> See Raymond Kuhn, *Media in France* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 103–4.

<sup>31</sup> See Peter Wicke and John Shepard, 'The cabaret is dead: rock culture as state enterprise – the political organization of rock in East Germany', in Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Shepard and Graeme Turner (eds), *Rock and Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 25–36.

<sup>32</sup> Contact Lida Hujic, Department of Communications, Goldsmiths College, London. E-mail: cop01ah@gold.ac.uk.

## Critical mass of Cuban cinema: art as the vanguard of society

OSCAR QUIROS

The *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfica* (ICAIC) has released over a thousand newsreels, experimental, documentary and feature-length narrative works since its establishment in March 1959. Several of these feature-length films, produced during the late 1960s and early 1970s, became known as *Cine imperfecto* (hereafter designated as Imperfect Cinema). Imperfect Cinema was responsible for making a reputation for Cuban film, but by the mid 1970s, Cuban filmmakers were purposely making a different style of cinema. This article focuses on the aesthetics of both Imperfect and Perfect Cinema, and on their relationship to the larger scale of ideological ramifications within Cuban society.

Julio García Espinosa coined the term Imperfect Cinema after the success of his innovative *Adventures of Juan Quin Quin/Juan Quin Quin* (1967), which embodied his ideas regarding the development of a counter-Hollywood film style. For García Espinosa and many of his fellow Latin American filmmakers, Imperfect Cinema was the answer to the need of creating 'a form of art that demonstrates the process of the problems . . . not a cinema to beautifully illustrate concepts and ideas we already know'.<sup>1</sup> García Espinosa placed supreme importance on cinema's 'efficacy in communicating information' and its ability 'to question the devices of the form and structure' of film.<sup>2</sup> His ideas were centred in the notion of an overt critical-utilitarian cinema with self-reflexive qualities: to use cinema to critique cinema, and bourgeois societies in the process. Aside from indicating the demonstrative, communicative and inquisitive qualities, these characteristics also convey an implicit utilitarian quality. In other

1 Julio García Espinosa, *Por un cine imperfecto* (La Habana: Edit. Salvador de la Plaza, 1973), p. 29.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

words, Imperfect Cinema possesses utilitarian features because it must perform a particular political function within society.

In contrast, Cuban films produced since the mid 1970s show the development of a new style that diverges from that of the previous era – as I will discuss in this article. However, scholars like Julianne Burton, Michael Chanan, Dennis West and Paulo Paranagua have virtually ignored, in their works on Cuban film, the aesthetic aspects of this new style, referred to as Perfect Cinema (as a contrast to Imperfect Cinema). Chanan, for example, concludes that by the late 1970s Imperfect Cinema had just about disappeared. He believes that since then Cuban cinema has given up the challenge of creating its own style in favour of imitating Hollywood.<sup>3</sup> Only Ana López and Paranagua have suggested that Cuban film since the mid 1970s is not in decline, but simply in a new trend.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, López observes that this new trend is linked to ideological changes within Cuban society.<sup>5</sup> López's position provides a starting point to develop the hypothesis that the new Cuban film style (that is Perfect Cinema) is closely related to contemporary Marxist thought, and that Cuban films falling under the Perfect Cinema rubric are, in turn, playing a role in Cuba's overall ideological evolution.

In the following discussion of both Imperfect and Perfect Cinema, the term 'style' will be used to indicate general and particular shared aesthetic traits identifiable within each of these groups of narrative–dramatic films. Style for Imperfect Cinema is thus defined by the specific techniques and qualities contextualized in orthodox Marxism's aesthetics of content over form, such as the use of 'type' characters, harsh imagery made by scratches, under/over exposure, high contrast, excessive movements of the camera, presentation of historical events and the wide use of hand-held camera. Let me add that 'type' alludes to those characters 'portraying concrete men [sic], in concrete situations, expressing concrete feelings' with a social configuration.<sup>6</sup> For Perfect Cinema, style is defined by the lack of the devices used by Imperfect Cinema, or any other imposed aesthetic formulae.

The purpose of this article is to assess the shifting interactions between Marxist ideology and the Cuban cinematic apparatus between 1959 and 1989, with a particular emphasis on the transition from Imperfect to Perfect Cinema. This shifting away from the aesthetics of Imperfect Cinema, rather than representing a decline in the quality of Cuban cinema, represents ideological and philosophical changes in the Marxist tradition that have been taking place outside, as well as inside, Cuba. Because cinema is the first 'element' of society that reflects such newer ideological perspectives, Cuban cinema (art) can be regarded as being in the *vanguard* in the pursuit of the Marxian ideal of human emancipation in Cuban society.

George Huaco provides the mode of analysis used to elucidate the

3 Michael Chanan, *The Cuban Image* (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 276.

4 Paulo Paranagua, 'News from Havana: a restructuring of the Cuban cinema', *Framework*, no. 35 (1988), pp. 88–103; and 'Letter from Cuba to an unfaithful Europe', *Framework*, nos 38–9 (1992).

5 Ana M. López, 'Revolution and dreams: the Cuban documentary today', *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, vol. 11 (1992), p. 48.

6 György Lukács from *A kulonosseg, mint esztetikai kategoria*, 218, quoted by Bela Kiralfalvi in *The Aesthetics of György Lukács* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 81.

7 George Huaco, *Sociology of Film Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 18.

8 See Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (1856) (London: Penguin, 1978).

9 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 328.

10 Kuan-Hsing Chen, 'Post-Marxism: between/beyond critical postmodernism and cultural studies', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 13 (1991), p. 35.

11 Mark Poster, *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: in Search of a Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 19.

relationship between cinema and philosophical change.<sup>7</sup> Huaco's Marxian model confirms that art, as a social product, relates to all other aspects of society and to the social whole. In the introduction to *Grundrisse*, Marx established that social wholes have multiple aspects that are internally related.<sup>8</sup> This mode of analysis is also supported by Gramsci's precept stating that ideology is a 'conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, law, in economical activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life'.<sup>9</sup> This model allows the application of two analytical approaches: orthodox Marxist and post Marxist.

The orthodox Marxist approach is based on the dialectical-materialistic tradition, from Georgi Plekhanov to Gyorg Lukács. The Hegelian dialectic influence provides orthodox Marxism with a scientific foundation, and with a principle of disclosure. This principle of disclosure refers to that phase of the analytic process which brings out what is implicitly, but not explicitly, articulated. This principle has served the Marxist analytical/revelatory method to explain the implicit structure of capitalism. Marx's interest in focusing on those implicit forces, or the content of capitalism, as opposed to the appearances of the system, was interpreted by later Marxists as the supremacy of content over form. This, in turn, was the main support for the development of an orthodox Marxian aesthetic where content prevails over form, a tenet of Imperfect Cinema.

The post-Marxist approach, on the other hand, 'distances itself from the dominant aesthetic criticism which privileges artworks as its central site of analysis. . . . [This approach] departs from a philosophical criticism which locates itself within the history of philosophy'.<sup>10</sup> This post-Marxist approach is based on the epistemology of Jurgen Habermas. Because of the limitations of orthodox Marxism in explaining, and avoiding, the human crises in capitalism and proletariat dictatorships, Habermas, following the legacy of the Frankfurt School, went back to study Marx's original thought. Habermas's project consists of a debate over the definition of:

modernity in the sociological term of Max Weber as the process of the differentiations of science, morality, and art into autonomous spheres. . . . In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas provided those conditions with the concept of the universal pragmatics of language. If public speech were structured properly the autonomous cultural domains of science, morality, and art would be integrated into society, thereby achieving human emancipation . . . fulfill[ing] the project of modernity as outlined by the Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>

Habermas's advanced concept of the three Weberian spheres gives Art an emancipatory quality against the dominating backdrop of the Polity and the Economy (this is why Weber's model of the three

- 12 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 291.

- 13 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), pp. 22–8.

- 14 Fidel Castro's speech on Lenin's centennial in Havana in 1970 confirms this. See Fidel Castro, *Lenin y Cuba* (Bogotá: Edic. Suramérica, 1970).

- 15 Max Azicri, *Cuba: Politics, Economics, and Society* (New York: Pinter, 1987), p. 73.

- 16 David Lane, 'Leninism', in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 279.

spheres is used). For Habermas, the existence of formal laws in and of themselves are enough to limit human freedom. He believes that 'the spread of legal regulations has the structure of a dilemma, because it is the legal means for securing freedom that themselves endanger the freedom of their presumptive beneficiaries'.<sup>12</sup> In this context, the less organically or structurally regulated an artform is, the more it appears to possess the quality to redeem the social whole from the domination of political power and reification. Freedom, therefore, appears to be the prime condition/element requisite for reaching Marx's goal of human emancipation. In other words, according to Habermas's analysis, subjectivity and freedom in Art are the *sine qua non* qualities of a post-Marxist aesthetic. By extension, it could be assumed that the domination of the Cuban Polity and Economy over Art can be counterbalanced by emphasizing the notion of freedom in the Art. As will be discussed later, it appears this is exactly what newer Cuban cinema is doing.

In particular, this critical mode allows for the analysis of the formal elements of the cinema, elements which contain implicit conceptions of the world, or ideology. Since orthodox Marxism and post Marxism are grounded in the premiss that society is divided into different activities related among themselves, I will use Max Weber's concept of the three spheres of society.<sup>13</sup> Max Weber elaborates on the 'rational' division of modern societies into three distinctive spheres: Science refers to the realm of production; Morality/Law refers to the activity of control and government; and Arts refer to creation. Following Habermas's Weberian model, I use the terms 'Economy', 'Polity' and 'Art' to indicate this division of the social whole. This critical approach serves to demonstrate that the sphere of Art, particularly cinema, performs an emancipatory role in the Cuban social whole.

Although Marxism–Leninism was not official until 1976, when the constitution was written and signed, Cuba had been basically functioning as a centralized Leninist state since late 1961.<sup>14</sup> Changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s have dropped the 'Leninist' wording in the constitution. But, as it was originally written, Article 1 of the 1976 Constitution recognized Marxism–Leninism as the state ideology, and gave the Communist Party the one and only leading role.<sup>15</sup> Leninism 'is an approach to the seizure of power for and by the proletariat and the building of socialist society, which legitimates revolutionary action by the Party on behalf of the working class'.<sup>16</sup> The dialectical–materialism of K. Kautsky, G. Plekhanov and Lenin became the heart of Cuban political discourse. Like the Bolsheviks, the Cuban Communist Party opted to lead the way toward social progress by institutionalizing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Plekhanov's principle of objective and indisputable truth was also

present in the Party's deontological viewpoints on what ought and ought not to be done in the Cuban social whole.

The Communist Party functioned in this Leninist vanguard position through its role as the ruling (and only) party, and through its establishment of the dictatorship in the name of the proletariat. In these roles, the Polity basically guided the sphere of Art from the early 1960s until the mid 1970s, through guidelines articulated in Fidel Castro's 'Palabras a los Intelectuales' (Words to the Intellectuals) speech of 1961. Taken as the official declaration of what was permissible or not in the exercise of art, this speech moulded the style and emphasis of Cuban Art during the Imperfect Cinema era.

Central to Castro's idea was that artists were free to express their own ideas and feelings in any way they wanted, as long as the revolution was neither questioned nor attacked: 'Within the revolution, complete freedom; against the revolution, none' (*Dentro de la revolución, todo; contra la revolución, nada*). According to Azicri:

There have been more statements by Castro and other leaders, particularly by Armando Hart, Minister of Education and of Culture, on cultural questions, but this initial broad and imprecise guideline remain[ed] the main stated policy.<sup>17</sup>

Some Cuban artists felt 'Palabras a los Intelectuales' was too limiting to their artistic freedoms. Many of these artists, like the Cabrera Infante brothers and Nestor Almendros, decided to leave the country in the early years of the revolution. However, the issue was not resolved by the departure of these and other dissidents. Orthodox bureaucrats, with a narrow view of the artists' needs and the revolution's best interest,<sup>18</sup> began to exercise their powers against artistic freedom. The situation reached its nadir with the incarceration of Heberto Padilla in 1971 and the 'rehabilitation' of homosexual artists. It took this crisis to move the government to re-evaluate its positions and guidelines. After this turmoil, the artistic environment began to improve.

This crisis was not as tumultuous for filmmakers as for other artists. As a matter of fact, ICAIC released *Los Días del Agua/Days of Water*, one of the best examples of Imperfect Cinema, in 1971. This is very indicative of the agreeable relationship between the Polity and the film establishment at that time. In 'Vanguardia Política y Vanguardia Artística', filmmaker Gutiérrez Alea discusses the level of freedom cinema enjoyed in Cuba and concludes that it was the filmmakers' trust in the revolution that made them set their own boundaries.<sup>19</sup>

After the 'Palabras a los Intelectuales' speech, filmmakers had to defend their rights to make films according to their own views and interpretations of the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary canon. Given that the National Council for Culture (CNC) had questioned and attacked ICAIC's early aesthetic experimentalism, ICAIC launched the most significant of its defences at the First National Cultural Congress in

17 Azicri, *Cuba, Politics, Economics, and Society*, p. 182.

18 Ibid., p. 186.

19 Gutiérrez Alea, 'Vanguardia Política y Vanguardia Artística', *Cine Cubano*, nos 54-5 (1969).

1962. Alfredo Guevara, then director of ICAIC, based his comments on the by then sacred 'Palabras', when he insisted:

that the endeavour of the artist was autonomous. For example, it has educational values but its purpose is not educational. ICAIC therefore believed that if a revolutionary message is required of the creator of a work of art, in the same way as of a political speech or a philosophical essay, then only one thing will be accomplished: the spiritual assassination of the creator, the asphyxiation of art in an oxygen tent.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Chanan, *The Cuban Image*, p. 132.

With Guevara's speech, ICAIC was able to gain the freedom necessary to develop artistically and also to serve the revolution. But by using 'Palabras' as a cornerstone of its defence, ICAIC tacitly signalled its adherence to Castro's guidelines.

Since Leninism was the recognized and accepted ideology of the Cuban government, then we may expect to find the same Orthodox aesthetic traits in Imperfect Cinema. For instance, in *La Primera Carga del Machete/First Machete Charge* (1969) the protagonists – Colonel Quirós, Colonel Campillo, Manuel Milanes, Benjamin Ramirez, Felíz Figueiredo and Máximo Gómez – serve to represent various 'types' of Spaniards and Cubans rather than functioning as dramatic personae who move and shape the narrative events of the film. They are not fully developed characters; rather, they represent aspects of an event – the Bayamo uprising against the Spanish Crown in October 1868 – which transcend their individual qualities. This narrative structure is a clear reversal of the typical Hollywood-type film where the historic event functions as a background to the larger-than-life romantic characters in the foreground.

This film employs hand-held camera and high contrast black-and-white in order to recreate the 'image' of early newsreel cinematography. Director Gómez wanted to 'deal with a historical event as if it were happening today, or better, as seen through the eyes of a person who would have been there as the events were taking place'.<sup>21</sup> The result is a rather convincing documentary-like feature film that appears to have been shot in 1868 (three decades before the dawn of the film age). Michael Chanan comments that 'these techniques [are] not so much to transport the viewer of the film into the past as to bring the past into the present . . . the very opposite of the conventional historical movie'.<sup>22</sup>

In another of Gómez's films, *Los Días del Agua/Days of Water*, characterization also complies with the typology. All characters possess one, or one set, of qualities. Antoinica is honest but simple minded; so, too, is the mob. The journalist is sceptical and keen, and the businessman is unscrupulous. The politician is dishonest. This film is a true story of the political manipulations of religious hysteria in the

<sup>21</sup> Michael Myerson, *Memories of Underdevelopment: the Revolutionary Films of Cuba* (New York: Grossman, 1973), p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> Chanan, *The Cuban Image*, p. 248.

Pinar del Rio province in the 1930s. The acting style in *Los Días* verges on the declamatory and the presentational. At first it suggests that there might be a casting and directorial problem. However, this style seems to fit Gómez's pseudo-documentary technique of capturing ordinary people confronting a real event. Within this style, actors sometimes acknowledge the camera that, for all intents and purposes, has become an extension of the omnipresent dramatic persona. This dramatic persona is the journalist who, by being able to see all, represents the ethical parameter of the action, similar to the role played by the chorus in Greek theatre. Thus, the characters, particularly the believers, by acknowledging the omnipresent journalist, are acknowledging his deontological parameters. The final impression is that the populace, the believers, are, in spite of their blind faith, seeking revolutionary guidance.

These sample films demonstrate the significant interconnection between Marxist orthodoxy and Imperfect Cinema. The official Marxism–Leninism of the Cuban Polity is implicitly and explicitly manifested, but because Cuban filmmakers were not forced to manifest and communicate party ideology, they could argue that Imperfect Cinema was reaffirming a coherent relationship between the Arts and the social whole. Consistent with the Imperfect Cinema proposition, these films served a utilitarian function.

By the late 1970s, however, Cuban cinema began to show some signs of aesthetic change. The controversy over Julio García Espinosa's Imperfect Cinema was a thing of the past. Filmmakers embarked on a new style that, superficially, could be considered in line with the Hollywood traditions. This is because post-Marxist aesthetics has no predetermined position in the relationship between content and form, the use of contemporary topics, or the possibility of using more imagery and/or developed characters. Aesthetic elements/devices are used freely according to the particular needs of each individual film. Yet they are Marxist because Perfect Cinema does not 'take' (using Chanan's term) the very codes of Hollywood to make films to be used as escapist entertainment. 'It is . . . necessary to try to reach the commercial screens with a kind of cinema that is essentially different from, for example, *Jaws*',<sup>23</sup> Gutiérrez Alea insists.

Unlike mainstream Hollywood-type films, Perfect Cinema is not oblivious to the structural and endemic problems of Cuban society. Perfect Cinema, on the contrary, professes freedom, de-reification and de-alienation, notions more in tune with Karl Marx's original epistemology as explained by Habermas's Critical Theory. Perfect Cinema thus falls within the post-Marxist realm. In *Amada* (1983), for instance, director Humberto Solás follows no aesthetic formula. This fictitious story deals with Amada's tribulations about whether or not to remain in an oppressive marriage in a traditional home and society, or to elope with her sensitive and attentive cousin, Marcial.

Two elements stand out in *Amada*: the cinematography, and the

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 'Beyond the reflection of reality', *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 125.

'blocking' of the actors. Cold pastels are so strong that a monochromatic sepia-like tone dominates over the virtually non-existent reds and hot colours. In terms of the blocking, the main characters are usually fixed in a setting throughout the shot. Even if they move, their movements are always slow and deliberate. When there are several characters in a shot, only one moves at a time. This limited-movement technique and the predominantly cold pastels help to embellish the film's oppressive mood. Perhaps these connotative elements are used in excess, but the sense of brooding interiority in *Amada* is so prevalent that the film ultimately emerges as a romantic melodrama whose pathetic qualities are reminiscent of Hegel's and Habermas's ideas on subjectivity: 'Modern art reveals its essence in Romanticism; an absolute inwardness determines the form and content of Romantic art'.<sup>24</sup> 'The subjective . . . gains autonomy under universal laws; but, "only with the will as subjective can freedom . . . be actual"'.<sup>25</sup> This romanticism, while diametrically opposed to the ideals of the orthodox Marxism, is at the same time in agreement with the Marxian idea of freedom (that is, the freedom that is central to the thematics of the romantic plot, and the freedom inherent in the director's aesthetic decision-making). *Amada* belongs to Perfect Cinema because of its overall aesthetic conceptualization, and, like most of the films of this period, does not appear to serve any particular political function.

*Cartas del Parque/Letters from the Park* (1988) also demonstrates the new aesthetics. Written by Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez and directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, this is perhaps the first full-blown love story in contemporary Cuban Cinema. Set just after the turn of the century, the film centres on a mature scribe, played by Victor Laplace, who pens love letters for lovers who come to him for assistance in the provincial city of Matanzas. One day, a beautiful young lady, played by Ivonne López, comes to hire the scribe to respond to a letter she has received from her suitor, played by Miguel Paneque. When López's character hands him the letter, the scribe realizes that he himself, on behalf of Miguel's character, wrote that letter to her. At that moment, both sides of an epistolary dialogue between the 'lovers' are developed by the scribe.

More than illuminating courtship practices of early twentieth-century Cuba, this film is an incisive study on the vagaries of love. The shift of emphasis from a scribe dealing with his clients from his *escritoire* by the park, to a scribe dealing with López away from his *escritoire*, serves to show his development and to suggest his inner conflicts. *Cartas del Parque* was Gutiérrez Alea's first film not dealing at all with politics or the revolution, as the director himself acknowledged in an interview in December 1988.<sup>26</sup> His reluctance to embrace Imperfect Cinema has also been clear in his writings, in which he has said that the primary function of cinema is to entertain, and to provide enjoyment through the representation of fictional

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Habermas quotes Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*.

<sup>26</sup> Vivian Gamoneda-León, 'Las Cartas de Gutiérrez Alea', *Revolución y Cultura*, no. 12 (1988), pp. 22–5.

situations which, though based on reality, will enrich and widen the understanding of that reality.<sup>27</sup> His elaborate depiction of the characters (especially the scribe), the sophistication of the cinematography and costumes, and the totally fictitious nature of the dramatic events, clearly place *Cartas* under the Perfect Cinema rubric.

Another example is *La Bella del Alhambra/La Belle from Alhambra* (1989), a film about Rachel, a chorus girl, who works in a cheap show without much hope of success. She dreams of using her talent in a better place, such as the La Alhambra Theatre, and becoming famous and loved by somebody special. Her talent and beauty help her ascend to fame. The settings and costumes in this film are among the most elaborate and detailed of any Cuban period film. The theatre set contains historically authentic details such as chandeliers, velvet seats and roof ornaments that replicate the era's art-nouveau style while also allowing for bravura mise-en-scene cinematography. Costumes are also appropriate; for instance, Rachel's wardrobe reveals that her taste and refinement are not affected by time or means. Her dresses of the tent-show days are very simple, yet their basic elegance helps distinguish her from her workmates. In her years of fame, her dresses continue to indicate that her character is not entirely affected by wealth. Although her silk dresses are fashionable they are not ostentatious, as they might easily be, given Rachel's vocation. In this sense, costume helps to connote and reveal the qualities of the characters.

Characterization in *La Bella* is also effective. Characters such as Adolfo Tivoli, Rachel's best friend, and indeed Rachel herself, are provided with greater dimensionality than the 'types' of Imperfect Cinema. Adolfo is talented, funny, melancholic, humble, loyal and honest. Rachel is also talented and loyal, yet she is ambitious, persevering and astute. As the story progresses, Rachel evolves from a naïve dancer to a smartly manipulative artist without losing compassion or love for her true friends. By the end of the film, these conflicting qualities culminate in her loss of power.

By 1989, with films like those, Cuban cinema had the formal sophistication to carry any revolutionary message, or none at all. Perfect Cinema had the freedom to employ all the aesthetic possibilities the medium can offer without having to resort to particular formulae. Its aesthetic qualities suggest that the sphere of Art is not aligned with the official orthodox ideology of the Cuban Polity. Indeed, Perfect Cinema proves that the sphere of Art can maintain its relative independence within the Cuban social whole. Perfect Cinema is not only a separate film style within Cuban cinema, but also a powerful argument for conceptualizing Cuban cinema as a phenomenon independent from the codes of Hollywood.

All Imperfect Cinema works share specific qualities. *Cumbite* (1964),

*Manuela* (1966), *Las Aventuras de Juan Quin Quin/Juan Quin Quin* (1967), *Lucia* (1968), *La Primera Carga al Machete/The First Machete Charge* (1969), *Los Días del Agua/Days of Water* (1971), *Páginas del Diario de José Martí/The Diary of Jose Martí* (1971), *Ustedes Tienen la Palabra/Now It's Up to You* (1973), *El Hombre de Maisinicú/The Man from Maisinicú* (1973), the trilogy *El Otro Francisco/Francisco, Rancheador/Rancher, Maluala* (1973), *La Última Cena/The Last Supper* (1974), *De Cierta Manera/One Way or Another* (1974) and *Patty Candela* (1976), among others, share demonstrative, communicative and utilitarian qualities articulated through different cinematic devices.

These films demonstrate that there are traits of Marxist orthodoxy in Imperfect Cinema. The ideology of the Cuban Polity is implicitly and explicitly manifested in them. They all served a utilitarian function, demonstrating the injustices of the colonial and capitalist systems; they were designed to instigate a revolutionary fervour. In short, Weber's and Habermas's ideas on the relative independence of the three social spheres were not applicable during the first fifteen years of the revolution. In fact, orthodox postulates on the dictatorship of the proletariat, objective truth and centralization attempted to unify society under the leadership of the Polity. And the fact that the majority of filmmakers centred their discussions on 'how to serve' the revolution implies that the euphoria and effervescence of the revolution's triumph influenced their views. Their decision to make utilitarian films was by no means the result of an imposed mandate from the Polity. Imperfect Cinema's ideological alliance with the Polity was, in this sense, largely circumstantial. In spite of ICAIC's conflict with the National Council for Culture in the early 1960s, Imperfect Cinema, by adhering to orthodox aesthetics, was reaffirming the orthodox Marxist ideology of the Cuban Polity. It can be concluded that in this affinity between the Polity (the Communist Party) and Perfect Cinema, the sphere of politics benefited the most.

Western concepts of the Polity as a sphere encompassing state and society derive from the Aristotelian tradition. Habermas believes that these concepts, when emerging from a subsistence economy based on agrarian and handicraft production, 'form the foundations for a comprehensive political order'.

Social stratification and differential participation in (or exclusion from) political power go hand in hand – the constitution of political authority integrates the society as a whole. This conceptual framework no longer fits modern societies, in which the commodity exchange (organized under civil law) of the capitalist economy has detached itself from the order of political rule. Through the media

28 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 37.

of exchange value and power, no systems of action that are functionally complementary have been differentiated out.<sup>28</sup>

Orthodox Marxism attempted to get away with this modern differentiation in Cuba. And, to a certain point, by centralizing the Economy and 'guiding' Art, it achieved this goal. The sphere of Economy was overpowered by the Polity, and Art was in great part voluntarily aligned with it, at least during the first fifteen years of the Marxist–Leninist government.

When Perfect Cinema emerged, it was not just a new aesthetic style. Perfect Cinema also suggested that the relationship between Art and the Polity had changed. Ana López's contention that the new aesthetic trend in Cuban cinema is linked to ideological changes within the social whole is correct.<sup>29</sup> The predominance of a cinema aesthetic relating to post-Marxist ideology reveals that the hegemony of Marxism–Leninism in Cuba does not have the same weight as it did throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. While the Polity continued to adhere to orthodox principles, Cuban society was moving towards new Marxist views. The existence of divergent trends in society indicates the presence of independent logics. During the Perfect Cinema era, Art began to operate under its own logic, not under the logic of the Polity.

29 López, 'Revolution and dreams', p. 2.

Habermas, following the Hegelian approach, proposes a political solution to the problem of alienation and reification. Yet he upholds 'the traditional Frankfurt School position that Art is an enclave of negation against the totalizing power of one-dimensional society'.<sup>30</sup> Art has the potential of indicating the existence of a set of logics independent of those of the Polity. This differentiation is what provides Art with the possibility of a subjective aesthetic–expressive quality, separate from a cognitive–instrumental Polity.<sup>31</sup> However, Habermas's problem of bringing a sense of unity between spheres in order to reach human emancipation remains unresolved.<sup>32</sup> Although his project of unification does not mean a subjective solution, he understands that subjectivity is, as the postmodernists insist, a pervasive condition of modernity, and a condition attained by means of freedom.<sup>33</sup> It is freedom, best found in the subjectivity of the sphere of Art, which offers the potential of redeeming humankind, the social whole, from the domination of political power and reification. That is, by appealing to and evoking subjective reason, the practitioner, as well as the consumer, of Art is potentially able to transcend the logics of a totalizing Polity and Economy.

Post-Marxist thinkers Mihailo Markovic and Svetozar Stojanovic propose a similar answer to the problem of alienation. Their solution, however, rests within the normative or deontological arena. Their praxis solution implies the conscious effort of the individual to avoid

30 Martin Jay, 'Habermas and modernism', in Richard J. Bernstein (ed.), *Habermas and Modernity* (Worcester: MIT Press, 1985), p. 126.

31 In Habermas's analysis, the three spheres are formed by three different rationality complexes: aesthetic–expressive, cognitive–instrumental and moral–practical. For detail, see Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume I (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), ch. III.

32 Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Réponse à la question: qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?', *Critique*, no. 419 (1982), p. 358, and Martin Jay, 'Habermas and modernism', p. 139, note that Habermas has not explained how art can come to the rescue without 'leading to an Adornoesque strategy of hibernation'.

33 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 16–19.

34 David Crocker, *Praxis and Democratic Socialism: the Critical Social Theory of Markovic and Stojanovic* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), p. 58.

any form of productive labour. As David Crocker argues, 'one can engage in praxis in such activities as gardening, arts, and crafts, and one can be a being of praxis in one's profession or remunerated activity when one's activity is an end in itself that realizes one's optimal dispositions.'<sup>34</sup> Their solution does not address the ontology of alienation and its social ramifications because it does not solve the problem of the self-consciousness of the individual while she/he is alienated. It provides, none the less, the rational differentiation that separates Art from productive labour. This epistemological distinction confirms and supports the presence of different logical complexes identified with the different spheres. From this premiss it can be posited that Art also evokes subjective reason, and by doing so moves the artist away from the logics of a totalizing Polity and/or Economy. Although Markovic and Stojanovic propose a different approach to the problem of alienation than that of Habermas, both solutions are based on the same epistemological categories emerging from the Enlightenment, particularly from Marx. Thus, both reconstitute the issues of subjectivity, freedom and creativity that so appropriately explain the behaviour of Cuban cinema within the Cuban social whole.

Freedom in itself is not one of the traditional aesthetic elements. However, the post-Marxist analytical approach discussed in this research posits 'freedom', 'emancipation' and 'creativity' as aesthetic qualities. Since freedom and creativity are conditions necessary for the goal of emancipation, I conclude that post Marxism privileges freedom as an imperative element for the emancipation of humankind. In this context, freedom in Art, even though it is a relative value, refers to the absence of predetermined aesthetic formulae. Traditional aesthetic elements, such as composition, plot, texture, rhythm, light and colour, volume and time, are always conditioned by the issue of freedom. In addition, in film the aesthetic issue is made more complex because of cinema's synchronous relations within the single image, and the relations of one image with the others. In other words, freedom refers to the availability of choices the artist has at her/his disposition. However, this arithmetically progressive number of artistic possibilities for manipulating its aesthetic elements is limited by the constraints of the cinema's capital-intensive nature (Economy) and the Polity's legal regulations. In this social constraint, the more choices the artist has available and employs, the greater the possibility for Art (cinema) to develop its own independent logic, thus leading humankind towards emancipation. As freedom is such an important quality in the Marxian quest for human emancipation, it explains why freedom became a central aesthetic issue in Cuban cinema.

One of the main themes which emerges from Perfect Cinema, and which illustrates its opposition to the logic of the Polity, is criticism of bureaucracy, Polity's functional base. This criticism is most prevalent in the films of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Humberto Solás. Gutiérrez

Alea's *La Muerte de un Burócrata/Death of a Bureaucrat* best exemplifies the plight of man's lonely fight against the oppression of bureaucracy. In this film, Gutiérrez Alea focuses not on the revolution, but on the pathology of modernity, specifically the logic of administration. The comic approach to the theme allows Gutiérrez Alea to criticize the entire spectrum of problems associated with bureaucracy without worrying about a backlash from the Polity. This criticism of the logic of the Polity has continued. In an interview with Silvia Oroz in 1984, Gutiérrez Alea remarked that the theme is still valid.<sup>35</sup> Juan Carlos Tabío's *Plaf/Splat* (1985) also uses an anti-bureaucracy theme. Called by *Variety*'s Paul Lenti the best Cuban film of the 1980s, this film is 'a satiric comedy that takes a hard look at bureaucracy, filmmaking, daily problems in Cuban life and "santería"'.<sup>36</sup>

Solás, too, expressed antagonism towards bureaucratic logic in an interview in 1988. In discussing ways of regaining the spontaneity of the early years of the revolution, Solás insisted that it should be done in the artistic rather than the bureaucratic realm.<sup>37</sup> His opposition to political solutions derives from such frustrations as the delay in the release of *Un día de noviembre* in the late 1960s. 'Happily, the balance tilted towards the side of reason, and with the creation of the Ministry of Culture, a climate of trust among artists and intellectuals soon developed.'<sup>38</sup> Obviously, when Solás talked about reason he was talking about artistic reason, or Art logic, and not bureaucratic reason. None the less, Solás pointed out the continuing threats of self-censorship and censorship in Cuba. These threats, Solás warned, should not exist because the 'revolutionary artist should have the freedom to say whatever he/she wants to say in any way they want to say it'.<sup>39</sup> Although they use 'orthodox' rhetoric, Gutiérrez Alea's and Solás's continuing criticism of state administration confirms the independence of the Art(ist) from the Polity in Cuba. By focusing on non-revolutionary issues in a revolutionary society, Perfect Cinema is making a clear statement of not conforming to the standards. And by criticizing bureaucracy, it is attacking the Polity's most important functional base.

Unlike a capitalist country, where the Economy has its own independence from the Polity, in Cuba the economic sphere is controlled by the Polity. The Polity, however, no longer has the same kind of control over the Arts as it did in the first fifteen years of the revolution. During the Imperfect Cinema era, Cuban cinema was committed to reinforce the revolutionary ideals of the Marxist/Leninist Polity. Since the mid 1970s, however, Perfect Cinema has moved away from orthodox ideology, reflecting larger ideological changes in the social whole. However, the Polity and the Economy did not reflect such changes until much later. In the late 1970s, the Polity introduced

35 Silvia Oroz, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea: *Los filmes que no filmé* (La Habana: UNEAC, 1989), p. 105.

36 'Solanas' *Sur* wins Grand Coral at 10th Havana Film Festival, Cuban *Plaf* garners 3rd. Prize', *Cuba Update* (Winter 1989), p. 25.

37 Wilfredo Cancio interview with Humberto Solás, 'Solás en tiempo de sinceridad', *Revolución y Cultura* (November 1988), p. 4.

38 Ibid., p. 7.

39 Ibid.

economic changes, such as private farming and marketing. Though rejected in 1986, a successful programme to allow 'joint-ventures' with foreign companies was maintained. But it was not until 1992 that the Polity actually introduced significant political changes. In July 1992, the Constitution was changed and Leninism was eliminated as an ideological guideline.<sup>40</sup> From this perspective, Cuban cinema clearly preceded other spheres in introducing significant ideological changes.

In Leninist theory, the Polity, through the Party, is the vanguard of the social whole. But in the mid 1970s, Perfect Cinema led with a move that the Polity later followed. Evidence suggests that Cuban cinema thus assumed a position of the vanguard role. The object of taking the mantle of the vanguard is to lead in the process of emancipation. Marx's critique of bourgeois society mapped humankind's escape route from the trap of exploitation, alienation and reification which capitalism had imposed. Although Marx's analysis fell short by not taking into consideration other forms of alienation (and the fact that contemporary capitalism is far less exploitative than in his days), Marx's basic premisses and final goal of emancipating society are still valid. In Cuba, the Communist Party consciously took the leading role to emancipate society early in the revolution, but there is no evidence that Art consciously appropriated that role. Actually, the Polity's loss of leadership calls attention to a particular problem of orthodox Marxism: its goal is to eradicate capitalism and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, but once this is achieved, orthodoxy does not have a philosophical stance for dealing with the consequences. Cuban Art, on the other hand, by adhering to notions of freedom and self-determination closer to Marx's original postulates, has been in a better position to provide insights on Marx's goal of emancipation, and in this way, move closer to it. Marx and post Marxists see 'freedom in terms of the removal of obstacles, that is to the manifold development of human powers and the bringing into being of a form of association worthy of human nature'.<sup>41</sup> This explains why Art, albeit unconsciously, took the leading role in moving society towards emancipation.

In May 1991, the central government started the process of merging ICAIC with the Television office and the Armed Forces studio. With this decision, the Film Institute lost some of its valued autonomy.<sup>42</sup> Yet most of ICAIC's loss actually comes from the Polity through the Economy. ICAIC's autonomy is being eroded by a budgetary system that does not depend on ICAIC's artistic capabilities and value, but on political decisions. Thus, the Film Institute survives on a fixed budget given by the Polity. Although these political rulings took place outside the period of analysis of this research, it nevertheless suggests that the emancipatory trend initiated by the sphere of Art was viewed by the Polity as a threat to its leadership. In other words, Art was taking a vanguard position that was incompatible with the orthodox

41 Steven Lukes, 'Emancipation', in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, p. 146.

42 Paranagua, 'Letter from Cuba to an unfaithful Europe', p. 5.

postulates on the dictatorship of the proletariat, objective truth and centralization.

It can be concluded, and acknowledged, that Imperfect Cinema was creative, innovative and possessed a distinctive style. None the less, in spite of ICAIC's efforts to find the necessary ideological space in which to create, Imperfect Cinema adhered to orthodox Marxist aesthetics. Since it voluntarily adhered to the same ideological principles as the Polity, Imperfect Cinema was reinforcing Polity's values.

Applying a post-Marxist approach to films produced after the mid 1970s confirms that the emerging Perfect Cinema deviates significantly from Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy. But this is not to accept Michael Chanan's opinion that Cuban cinema has taken the facile road of imitating the codes of Hollywood's commercial style. There is enough evidence to suggest that the aesthetic transition from Imperfect to Perfect Cinema rather represents changes in Cuba itself.

George Huaco contends that, 'the formal link between the two [approaches applied] is the assumption that the major political, social and economic changes in the larger society tend to affect art, or film, by being channelled or filtered through the social structures which constitute their social matrix'.<sup>43</sup> In line with Huaco, it is clear that those predispositions for change in Cuban society were first manifested in the sphere of Art, particularly in cinema. And because they were first manifested in cinema, it seems reasonable to conclude that Perfect Cinema led the way in the transition from Leninism towards the Marxian ideal of emancipation from political power and reification. In addition, since cinema has been ahead of the other spheres, it demonstrates that Art can be placed in the vanguard of the social whole. Thus, post Marxism, particularly Habermas's epistemology, may demonstrate why and how Perfect Cinema could fulfil the Marxian ideal of functioning as a liberating agent and action-paradigm for human emancipation in Cuban society.

<sup>43</sup> Huaco, *Sociology of Film Art*, p. 8.

report:

## Film studies in Sweden: cinema arts and back again?

GÖRAN BOLIN and MICHAEL FORSMAN

A fundamental problem in exporting Swedish films and knowledge about filmmaking has, of course, been the language barrier. This has also been one reason why Swedish film studies has lived its life on the margins of international film research. With the exception of a few books on Swedish film history and Swedish film directors which have been translated into English,<sup>1</sup> a couple of articles in international film journals and anthologies,<sup>2</sup> and the extensive (mainly US) research on Bergman, which in some cases refers to writings in Swedish,<sup>3</sup> very little has been able to cross the English language border.

Our aim in this article is to describe and discuss the present situation within film studies in Sweden. In so doing, we will very briefly analyse the historical background to the institutionalization of film studies as an academic discipline, discuss the present situation and make some speculations about the future.

### Early film studies and studies of early film

The first public screenings in Sweden took place at an industrial and handicraft fair in Malmö, 28 June 1896. Permanent cinematic establishments were founded in different cities around the country, beginning in Stockholm in 1904. The events included a mixture of shorter films (one reel), and the audience primarily consisted of people

<sup>1</sup> For example: Bengt Forslund, *Victor Sjöström; His Life and His Work* (New York: Zoetrope, 1988); Maria Bergom-Larsson, *Ingmar Bergman and Society* (London: Tantivy Press, 1978); Leif Furhammar and Folke Isaksson, *Politics and Film* (London, New York and Washington: Studio Vista Publishers, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tytti Soila, 'Valborgsmässafton: melodrama and gender politics in Swedish cinema', in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (eds), *Popular European Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 232–44; 'Five songs of the scarlet flower', *Screen*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1994), pp. 265–74.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Birgitta Steene, *Ingmar Bergman: a Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987).

from the lower social strata. The taxation on entertainment that was initiated in 1911, in which film screenings were included, further confirmed the low status of the medium as an artform.

The bad reputation of the medium did not change, as could have been expected, with the systematic and extensive production of full-length feature films. In spite of taking up established and well-reputed plays and literary classics, the public reception was negative, especially among the cultural elite. In the wake of a public debate over film's allegedly bad influence on its (young) audience, the Swedish national system of censorship was institutionalized as the world's first organized attempt to regulate moving images, in 1911. The national censorship, with its aesthetically and morally legitimating perspective, could be said to be the first insitutionalized form of 'analytical' discourse, *and* archive of information, on film in Sweden. This has made it a major source for film research.<sup>4</sup>

Another dimension of this early debate was the pedagogical discourse among school teachers with enlightening ambitions. One of the pedagogical possibilities of the new medium was, for example, the point of departure for Frans Hallgren in what is considered to be the first published book on film in Sweden – *Kinematografien ett bildningsmedel*.<sup>5</sup>

The status of the medium rose after World War I, due to the internationally acclaimed adaption of Swedish literary classics by Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström. From this followed a demand for a heightened level of journalistic criticism.

Alongside journalistic film critique, several cinematic societies emerged during the 1930s. This turned out to be a fertile soil for the central figures within Swedish film research. The activities of Svenska Filmsamfundet (the Swedish Film Society), originally founded in 1928, resulted in the publishing of pamphlets, sketches of film history, portraits of directors and annual reports.

Of great significance for film studies are, of course, film archives. As early as 1912, the city of Gothenburg set up an archive for moving images of the city for future research. The same year saw the emergence of an archive for newsreels in the regime of Svenska Biografteatern. This archive was taken over in 1964 by the Swedish Radio (Sveriges Radio), and is today a major source for historical documentaries made for television.

A broader focus and an interest in feature films signified Svenska Filmsamfundets Arkiv (the Swedish Film Society's Archive). It was initiated in 1934, the same year as the Film Library in New York, and a year before La Cinémathèque Française, and several other archives around the world. In 1940, it was renamed Filmhistoriska Samlingarna (the Filmhistorical Collections). With a large collection of newspaper clippings, an impressive archive for film stills and a library, it became a central source for journalists, and also a centre for the emerging film research. In 1964 the archives were transferred to Svenska

- 4 Cf. Arne Svensson, *Den politiska saken. En studie i Statens biografbyrås tillämpning av den utrikespolitiska censurnormen sedan 1914* (Stockholm: Hedengrens, 1976); Jan Olsson, *Svensk spelfilm under andra världskriget* (Lund: Liber, 1979).
- 5 Cf. Rune Waldekranz, 'Filmstudier och filmforskning. En orientering i internationell och svensk film litteratur', in Gösta Werner (ed.), *Svensk filmforskning* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt och Söner Förlag, 1982), pp. 11–80.

Filminsitutet (The Swedish Film Institute, hereafter abbreviated SFI). The Holger and Thyra Lauritzen Foundation for the Promotion of Research into the History of the Cinema (founded in 1952) has (especially since the 1960s) also been a very important part of Swedish film research, giving financial support to projects and publications.

Although many people were interested in film and involved in writing on film, three men could be said to have dominated early film research; Bengt Idestam-Almquist, Gösta Werner and Rune Waldekranz. Their published works, ranging from overviews of the historical development of film internationally, to portraits of Swedish filmmakers and producers, laid the grounds for the future of film studies in the academy. Of great importance for this development was that all three were also involved with the actual production of film.

### **The film reform and The Swedish Film Institute**

As a consequence of the enormous decline in the cinema audience in the late 1950s there was a so-called film reform in 1963. One important outcome of this reform was the founding of the SFI. Harry Schein, formerly a film critic, was the main architect of the film reform. He was also the highly controversial director of the SFI during its most influential and dynamic period (1964–79).

The SFI was financed through a percentage (ten per cent) of ticket sales. Out of this ten per cent, two-thirds were reinvested in film production. The remaining third was used for non-commercial activities by the SFI: film archive, film restoration, film clubs, library, film research, publishing of books and journals. It was also agreed that the SFI should set up a course in film production, which was started in 1964, headed by Rune Waldekranz.

The SFI had an important role in the publishing of literature on film, similar to that of the British Film Institute. The two most important research projects initiated by the SFI were the compilation of a Swedish filmography, and the foundation of a film archive through the incorporation of private collections, amongst others the Filmhistorical Collections. It was decided that the filmography should be published in seven volumes, each covering a decade between 1896 and 1979. These volumes document facts about all feature films shown publicly in Sweden. They include production credits, abstracts, quotes from reviews, and so on. In addition to this, they have an index, a register and a list of titles in English. They also have a lengthy foreword, where overarching trends within the decade in question are covered. Several of the filmographies also contain essays on important directors of the time, as well as summaries of public

debates. Although minor errors can be found, these are of invaluable importance to Swedish film research.

### **The institutionalization of Film Studies**

In the same year as the film reform, it became possible for the first time in Sweden to attend a course on 'the history and theory of film'. The course was given at the then Department of Theatre History at the University of Stockholm, and was led by Rune Waldekranz, a long-time doctoral student in the Department.

In 1970, Waldekranz became the first professor of film studies. The appointment was made after a long process, with lobbying from Harry Schein, the SFI (which also financed the professorship in the beginning) and the Lauritzen Foundation. The Department was amalgamated with theatre history as a Department of Theatre and Cinema Arts.

In the first curriculum it stated that the discipline should cover three areas: the history and theory of film; the psychology and sociology of film; and film pedagogics. In his inaugural lecture Waldekranz strongly emphasized that the discipline was to be considered as belonging to the humanities. This proximity to the humanities and to theatre studies can be seen as an indication of a research interest that was historical-aesthetical-philosophical.

But at a very early stage in the history of the Department a controversy arose concerning the direction that film studies should take. Many students advocated the pursuit of sociological theories and practical film production. In course literature from the 1970s, it is evident that media sociology was foregrounded. In addition to the standard courses in film history, and some minor practical projects in 8 mm filmmaking, there were several courses in mass communication research perspectives and sociopsychologically oriented film analysis. As a consequence of this sociological interest, it was possible as a student, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to choose between either 'traditional' film studies or film studies with a 'television perspective' from the second term onwards.

When it started in 1972, the PhD programme attracted nine students. In their, and their successors', choice of dissertation subject, a certain bias towards mass media sociology can be detected.

As in many other disciplines in the academy at the time, there were strong influences from historical materialist approaches and variants of Marxist theory. Some of the doctoral students and teachers in film studies also published anthologies of, as well as studies influenced by, Marxist film theory. Some of these belonged to a group of doctoral students from Uppsala, which formed around the journal *Filmhäftet* (founded in 1973). This, along with the SFI-produced magazine *Chaplin* (founded in 1959), has been the most influential journal for

Swedish film research and writing. The quarterly journal, with ambitious theme issues on contemporary film in different nations, family cinema and television, soon became a platform for researchers from the critical Left with an interest in new theoretical perspectives.

As well as the introductions to international film research and theoretical classics that were provided by these journals, a number of anthologies with texts by classical theoreticians such as Astrue, Balázs, Bazin, Eisenstein, Metz, Sarris, Wollen, Zavattini were also published during the 1970s.

Much of the new research and criticism was produced on the margins of the Department. The few dissertations that were presented in the 1970s (in most cases already written within the framework of other disciplines) belonged to mainstream research with a lack of theory, mainly focused on Swedish film history: the life and work of Mauritz Stiller, Victor Sjöström and the Swedish painter and film avant gardist Viking Eggeling, respectively; the praxis of the foreign policy norm by the National Board of Film Censors; and Danish silent cinema.<sup>6</sup>

In 1978, Leif Furhammar, former film critic and television producer with an academic background in pedagogy was appointed professor at the department in Stockholm. His qualifications for the post consisted of, among other things, his books on the effects of film, politics and film, and Swedish film history. The department he took over was theoretically undefined, but also, in its personnel, policy and administration, very complicated.

One of the more pleasant duties for the new professor was the responsibility for the research project 'Land och stad i svensk fiktionsfilm' (Town and country in Swedish cinema). The project was initiated by Waldekranz, and under the guidance of Furhammar it focused on the popular films of the 1930s and 1940s, films which had long since been a laughing stock, and exemplified bad cinema among intellectuals.

In the dissertations to come out of this project, one can see an attempt to study these films as symbolic expressions of the decline of an agricultural Sweden and a bridging of the transition to modern, industrialized and highly rationalized urban life in a strong welfare state.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes this also had a feminist perspective.<sup>8</sup>

One way to characterize film studies at the department in Stockholm during the 1980s, is that it moved from basic research, via structuralistic readings of genres and thematics, to an increased interest in narratology, psychoanalysis and aesthetics, and philosophical questions – for example, on time, space and framing in the offscreen space in Tarkovsky's films.<sup>9</sup> A dissertation on Ingmar Bergman's aesthetics, and how these had changed over the years, was also submitted.<sup>10</sup>

However, there was also a dissertation on US film comedians, using anthropological and folkloric perspectives, as well as theories on

6 Gösta Werner, *Mauritz Stiller och hans filmer 1912–1916* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1969); Louise O'Konor, *Viking Eggeling, artist and filmmaker* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1971); Svensson, *Den politiska saken*; Marguerite Engberg, *Dansk stumfilm I–II. De store år* (København: Rhodos, 1978); Bengt Forslund, *Victor Sjöström. Hans liv och verk* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1980).

7 Per Olav Qvist, *Jorden är vår arvedel. Landsbygden i svensk spelfilm 1940–1959* (Uppsala: Filmförlaget, 1986); Kjell Jerselius, *Hotade reservat. Spelfilmerna med Edvard Persson* (Uppsala: Filmförlaget, 1987).

8 Tytti Soila, *Kvinnors ansikte. Stereotyper och kvinnlig identitet i trettiotalets melodramfilm* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1991).

9 Astrid Söderbergh Widding, *Gränsbilder. Det dolda rummet hos Tarkovskij* (Stockholm: Department of Theatre and Cinema Arts, 1992).

10 Maaret Koskinen, *Spel och speglingar. En studie i Ingemar Bergmans estetik* (Stockholm: Department of Theatre and Cinema Arts, 1993).

11 Olle Sjögren, *Lekmannen i skrattspeglin* (Uppsala: Filmförlaget, 1989).

12 Örjan Roth Lindberg, *Skuggan av ett leende. Om filmisk ironi och den ironiska berättelsen* (Stockholm: Fischer & Co., 1995).

13 See Olsson, *Svensk spelfilm under andra världskriget*.

identity and modernity.<sup>11</sup> Cinematic irony and ironic narrative were also the focus of a dissertation.<sup>12</sup>

### The present situation

A certain displacement regarding choice of subject is noticeable today among the new PhD students at the Department, away from the earlier studies of low-valued Swedish popular film, towards the silent era, historiography, neoformalist narratology and auteur criticism.

The changes in staff and in the direction of the Department are partly explained by Jan Olsson's appointment as professor in 1993. He previously had a very long and productive career as associate professor at the Unit for Drama–Theatre–Film in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Lund. Olsson has also published much about Swedish film history, for example in his dissertation on the depictions of 'foreign powers' in some 'occupation films'.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, he is similar to his predecessors Waldekranz and Furhammar, although he has a greater interest in the silent era and a more 'pure' academic ambition.

Parallel to the interest in early cinema and modernity, the possibilities of using new technologies in film research are being explored. Presently, two research projects are being conducted that aim to investigate the methodological possibilities of computer technology, for example electronic codification of images in order to subject film to meticulous analysis.

To conclude, we will point out some tendencies that can be discerned in Swedish film studies of today. Firstly, there is a growing *formalization* of film studies, just as in many other academic disciplines. As opposed to the situation during the 1970s and 1980s, it is now a necessity to have a doctoral degree to be able to teach as a permanent member of staff, and at undergraduate level it is now expected that students study for four terms, since this is what is required for an MA. As a consequence, the amount of MAs taken at the Department has increased substantially in the 1990s.

A second tendency, which is also shared by many academic disciplines, is an increasing *internationalization*. Swedish film researchers are today publishing articles in international anthologies and journals to a greater extent than before. Even more notable is the frequency with which internationally well-reputed scholars have been visiting Stockholm. David Bordwell, Tom Gunning, Janet Staiger, Linda Williams, Jackie Stacey and Richard Dyer are some of the guests who have taught courses and delivered lectures during the last two or three years.

On a national level there is, thirdly, a tendency towards *decentralization* of film studies in Sweden. Since the early 1970s Lund has had a Unit for Drama, Theatre and Film placed at the Department

- 14 Lars Lönnroth, *Östeuropeisk animerad film* (Lund: Institut för dramaforskning, 1979); Gunnar Lundin, *Filmregi Alf Sjöberg* (Lund: Institut för dramaforskning, 1979); Erik Hedling, *Lindsay Anderson och filmens estetik* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1992); Lars Gustaf Andersson, *Ånglarnas barn* (Lund: Bokbox, 1992).

for Comparative Literature, and up until now, five dissertations have been completed there. Besides the dissertation mentioned above by Jan Olsson, there were two others in 1979 and 1992, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Since the late 1980s, film studies is also taught at undergraduate level at several other places in Sweden.

Fourthly, given the competitive situation following this decentralization of the discipline, some kind of *profile* among the departments and units will no doubt emerge, even though Stockholm will probably be keen to secure the right to define what a graduate education should contain. The Department of Cinema Studies at Stockholm also has reason to define itself against the media education and research that is carried out at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMK), situated in the vicinity of the Department of Cinema Studies. JMK, formed in 1989 by a merging of the School of Journalism and the Centre for Mass Communication Research at Stockholm University, provides two kinds of education: the mainly practical education of journalists, and degrees in Media and Communication Studies. Within the latter, there is at JMK – in addition to more traditional communications research and reception studies – a strong interest in popular culture, and research into media and everyday life. With a research interest in television, radio, film, video, music and printed media, traditional mass communications research is combined with youth cultural studies, cultural studies, cultural sociology and critical theory. Several of the teachers at JMK have a background in film studies, and some of the projects and dissertation projects are related to film.

In other words, some of the research that was done within film studies during the 1970s and 1980s is now conducted by JMK. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that television and video culture seems to have vanished from the Department of Cinema Studies, following the dispersal of the teachers most interested in those areas of film and media education to other parts of the country. It would be unfortunate if the ambition of the leading lights of film studies were to isolate and concentrate the discipline within rigid studies of (canonized) Film since technical, media, cultural and theoretical development seem to point to quite another direction.

However, some of the tendencies we have identified in film studies in Sweden are not compatible. The tendency towards formalization and the tendency towards decentralization are in fact contradictory, at least in the short term. There are simply not enough people with a doctoral degree to support the various departments and units. In fact there are not even enough doctors in film studies to uphold the doctoral education at the department in Stockholm.

It could therefore be questioned whether an accelerated decentralization is possible, or even desirable. The department in Stockholm has an enormous advantage. The greatest competence is concentrated there (it has most people with a doctoral degree) and,

academically, Stockholm has the strongest and most widespread network of contacts. Video technologies have in many ways revolutionized film research. Compared to the regional units, the department in Stockholm is, however, provided with the best material conditions, especially for historical research through its physical closeness to the SFI's library and film archive as well as to Arkivet för ljud och bild (the National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images), where copies of everything that has been screened at theatres in Sweden since 1978, and most of what has been shown on television, and sold or rented out on video, are filed. A further manifestation of the central position of the department in Stockholm is the newly launched academic film journal *Aura*, with Professor Olsson as main editor, and with an advisory board of prominent international film scholars.

There is also a move to get a second professorship to the department in Stockholm. The outcome of this is still uncertain. Following the tendency towards decentralization, it could be argued that the professorship should be based at another department, for example in Lund. On the other hand, a professorship placed in Stockholm could further strengthen the research unit already present, and lead to an increased academic formalization.

There are several explanations for the fact that the historical and aesthetical direction has been forefronted at the department in Stockholm. One is the research interest among its professors. Waldekrantz had a stated historical interest in film, so did Furhammar, and subsequently Olsson. It could also be explained by the enormous influence of the Lauritzen Foundation. The full name of the foundation is *The Holger and Thyra Lauritzen Foundation for the Promotion of Research into the History of the Cinema*, and time and again there have been discussions on the board about whether certain projects should get grants or not when they have lacked a historical dimension in their outline.

The phase in the 1970s and early 1980s in the department's history, when influences from mass communications theory were strong, is thus exceptional. When the subject was initiated as an academic discipline, the name chosen was *Institutionen för filmvetenskap*, which in direct translation would be *The Department for Film Studies*. However, the English name chosen was the *Department of Theatre and Cinema Arts*. Firstly, 'arts' connects it firmly within an historical-aesthetic tradition within the humanities. Secondly, in choosing 'cinema', instead of 'film', one excludes distributive techniques of moving images such as video and television. A department of Cinema Arts could, if judged solely by the name, only study moving pictures screened at the cinema, most probably from an aesthetic point of view. This also indicates a bias towards the cinematic text which excludes studies of audiences, if not done from the perspective of textual construction or spectator positioning, in which the cinematic text is

seen as the founding entity of meaning, not the historical and social subjects that experience the images. Questions of everyday media use and cinematic cult(ure)s thus become less interesting. There is also a methodological explanation for the division between the department in Stockholm and the research on film carried out at other departments, JMK included. The methods used within the department in Stockholm are mainly text oriented, while many of those who study film at other departments have more ethnographic perspectives. Likewise, questions of production and its economic and sociological outcomes have been of less interest in Stockholm.

That the choice of new name for the department when it split from Theatre Arts was the US formulation 'Cinema Studies' instead of the British term 'Film Studies', also indicates something about its research interests and the direction it looks for theoretical inspiration. Thus, British cultural studies-inspired research is dismissed.

If the late 1970s could be characterized by a lively discussion about the focus of study, there seems in the present situation to be a lack of reflexivity and discussion about methods, theories and research subjects, as well as a lack of interest in contemporary film culture. Therefore it will be of great significance to see how the bid for another professorship evolves, where this will be placed, and if it will contribute to the broadening of the field of research. A narrowing of the research focus could at worst evolve into further estrangement from other disciplines, and lead to a short-sighted elitism where alternative theories and fertile academic crossovers are suppressed. It is our hope that things will not develop this way.

### **Moving Performance Conference: 'The British Experience of Early Cinema', University of Bristol, 6–8 January 1996**

Although the contemporary interest in the earliest forms of cinema – what Noël Burch termed 'primitive cinema' – dates back at least to the Brighton FIAF conference in 1978, the centenary of cinema has brought a renewed interest in that tantalizing and remote period when the first moving images appeared in the music halls and fairgrounds of industrially advanced countries such as Britain, France and the USA. This conference probed those moments using the conventional academic conference modes of keynote address and specialized paper delivery, but these were supplemented with recreations of the kinds of cultural practice – theatre, music hall, magic lantern shows – within which the new form inserted itself, an exhibition of film and theatre memorabilia, and a screening programme of early British films.

Bristol University's Department of Drama, with its long-standing record of film teaching, is ideally placed to investigate the varied and complex relationships between theatre and early cinema, and its students provided a vigorous and pleasurable opening to the conference with a highly original multimedia rendition of a nineteenth-century temperance play. The events of the play were presented in various forms – dramatic performance, photographic slides, simulated early film – illustrating the various influences on screen acting such as vaudeville, the magic lantern show and theatrical melodrama, and incorporating a live version of the 'butterfly dance' popularized in early film. In the dramatic high point of the performance, one of the central characters ran on stage and confronted his own image on the screen in a novel echo of the apocryphal experiences of early cinema audiences who ducked out of the

way of oncoming trains to avoid anticipated collisions between image and reality. The recreation of a magic lantern show, complete with running commentary, illustrated very effectively the range and variety of this popular nineteenth-century form. These events concretized in an imaginative way the concerns of the weekend in their presentation of the range of influences on the infant medium which were explored in the conference papers. Although the conference papers ranged over a wide spectrum of early cinema – Shakespearian film, the early crime film, censorship, the role of women in early cinema – three themes were of particular interest. The first concerns historical periodization, the second the general influence of theatrical acting styles on early film, and the third the variety of venues for early cinema.

Ian Christie suggested that the previous interest in early cinema had concentrated on formal matters, on the identification of the period from the mid 1890s to around 1906 as a distinctive stylistic period later to be named 'the cinema of attractions'. He discussed his television series *The Last Machine* (BBC, 1995) as a contribution to the wider social/cultural understanding of early cinema, and the extracts from the series shown to the conference indicated the various ways in which the medium has to be seen in relation to the development of modernity as a general cultural condition. (See Alison Butler, 'The last/vision machine', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 [1995], pp. 408–17, for a discussion of this series.) Yet his contribution also pinpointed a general problem in terms of the historical positioning of cinema. It is conventional to talk about the 'birth of the cinema', but the title – *The Last Machine* – is drawn from filmmaker Hollis Frampton's contention that the cinema was a terminal, rather than an originating, point; the end of an era and not its beginning. David Robinson, refusing both notions, also refused to recognize the centenary, tracing the cinema back several

centuries to its origins in the *camera obscura*, with the period under scrutiny as part of a grand continuum. In concrete terms, the recreated magic lantern show with its selection of 'animated' slides certainly posed a question mark over the notion that 'motion pictures' arrived in the mid 1890s, reinforced notions of a continuum, and illustrated well the benefits of incorporating the 'experiential' element in the conference.

The second theme – acting styles – emerged very appropriately in such a conference venue, and a number of the papers, including the keynote addresses by Jackie Bratton and Christine Gledhill, focused upon the influence of theatrical acting on cinema. Bratton discussed the ways in which the music hall and variety sketches produced particular performance styles which became part of the cinema's stock-in-trade and, indeed, subsequently fed through to television, and were characterized by a form of intimacy with the audience – 'direct address' in the words of Frank Scheide's paper on the same topic – which reflected the live origins of the performance style in a theatre setting. Gledhill concentrated upon the general influence of theatre on the British cinema of the 1920s, incorporating comments on melodramatic acting – a great influence on Hollywood cinema – but concluding that it fed into British cinema in a different way, through a process of refinement, as its conventions encountered the emerging British theatrical traditions of the society drama and the well-made play. Her paper also sketched other ways in which the theatre exercised an influence on cinema, including ideas about the 'theatricalization of space' – the use of frames within frames, arches, doorways, distinctive performance spaces within the *mise-en-scène*. In short, a tendency towards 'tableau pictorialization', a trend also noted by Andrew Higson in his chapter (three) on Cecil Hepworth in *Waving the Flag* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) and attributable to influences from

'pictorialist' photography as well as the theatre.

In his book based on *The Last Machine* (London: BBC/British Film Institute, 1994), Ian Christie notes that the new phenomenon of cinema, despite five years of existence, was not considered noteworthy enough to figure in a special edition of the *Daily Mail* commemorating the birth of the twentieth century (p. 9). One of the reasons for this could be the diffused way in which films circulated in these early years. The variety of ways in which the first viewers and audiences experienced early films delayed the perception of cinema as a distinctively new form, although in time it was to acquire its own premises – nickelodeons and picture palaces – and its own identity in the face of the various cultural practices which it resembled. In addition to the reconstruction of one of the venues – the 'penny gaff' – in the dramatic performance, the conference included papers dealing with William Haggart's travelling cinema (Dave Berry), the fairground bioscope show (Mervyn Heard) and, in Scotland, the Skating Palace (Adrienne Scullion). To complete the spectrum of viewing venues, Sue Dinsmore's paper drew attention to the existence of domestic viewing during the period which suggests that the cinema in its hundred years of life has come full circle, with the advent of television and video bringing about the 're-emergence' of domestic viewing.

This imaginative and extremely well-organized conference represented a healthy engagement between two cultural forms which have frequently been conceived of as in conflict. There is, in the literature of cinema, a long history of terms such as 'theatrical', 'canned theatre', 'stage-bound', directed critically at films which have failed to establish a distinctive cinematic identity. However, the conference demonstrated that both in terms of institutional and artistic development, the theatre was crucial in the cinema's development from the very

beginning, and that detailed exchange between scholars of both cultural practices is a prerequisite for our understanding of this.

Tom Ryall

### **Pordenone Silent Film Festival, 13–21 October 1995**

If the 1995 celebration of cinema's centennial has become an international event, with innumerable film screenings, publications and conferences in many countries, then the primary source of inspiration for these commemorations may be sought in northern Italy. Over the years, the festival of the silent cinema in Pordenone has worked to create a most favourable atmosphere, preparing the world for the centennial since its inception in 1982. The festival has not only functioned as a show case and an eye-opener for the richness of cinema's past, it has also been a breeding ground for new initiatives. Behind the city walls, many participants have made plans to start new festivals, preservation projects, historical publications and conferences. The example of Pordenone has proved to be infectious; it has been copied over and over again. Viewed from this perspective, it is easy to understand why the festival itself would pay little attention to the centennial in 1995. Certainly, the films of Lumière were exhibited in large numbers, but only in the context of a special section devoted to nonfiction films of the early period. It is characteristic of this innovative festival that nonfiction occupied a central place in the programme, celebrating the least popular and least well known of all films, the outcasts of the centennial. The audience was treated to a bombardment of travelogues, documentaries, medical films, family films, and so on. Although early cinema has produced a great variety of topical subjects, historians still struggle to evaluate them. The question of whether early nonfiction films have distinct styles is still open to debate.

While progress has been made with the study of fiction films, little has been achieved in the area of documentary film so far.

Funded by the Getty Foundation for the first time, the rich and overcrowded festival programme had sections devoted to genres (nonfiction), directors (a retrospective of Henry King, and the animation series of Koko the Clown by Max and Dave Fleischer), archives (Paris, Copenhagen, New Zealand) and countries (China, Israel), not to mention special events like magic lantern shows or David Robinson's travelling film museum. In addition, single feature films were screened. A highlight was the showing of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) accompanied by music and sound effects based on an original sound scenario written by Vertov himself. This wonderful manuscript was recently uncovered in the state archives in Moscow, and published in *Griffithiana* 54. The Alloy Orchestra presented its own (rather bombastic) interpretation of this experimental sound script and its performance revealed what nobody had ever been able to imagine before: Vertov was fascinated by filming the visual effects of audible events. An astonished audience witnessed the resurrection of an old classic as a brand-new masterpiece.

Pordenone had more surprises in store, however, particularly in the category of 'lost and found' films. For example, Ernst Lubitsch's comedy *Als ich tot war/When I was Dead* (1916) was rediscovered in Ljubljana last year, and the preserved print had its premiere at this festival. Similarly, the Cinémathèque Française, in a section of its own, showed unknown gems like *Minuit Place Pigalle* (René Hervil, 1927), *La Commune* (Armand Guerra, 1914), as well as an unidentified Russian masterpiece with a provisional title, *L'aurore de la révolution* (1913?).

In this context, it is striking to find that Italian films and archives were almost absent from the festival, particularly since they had been abundantly present in the past. On the

other hand, the non-western countries seem to have established a firm position in the regular programme. Further to last year's screenings of the silent movies of India – a rare experience and a great spectacle – the audience this year had the privilege of watching a number of Chinese silent pictures made between 1922 and 1938. These films have been kept out of sight for many years, not unlike the pre-revolutionary films of Russia. Some seem to compete with western examples in subject matter and style; the Shanghai studios had a particular predilection for urban melodramas of fallen women who try to preserve their moral integrity in a rotten society, the kind of human tragedies that were to become the hallmark of neorealism. The actress Ruan Lingyu played many of these roles in an exemplary way, with great restraint and emotional power, as could be witnessed in *Shenni/The Goddess*, directed by Wu Yonggang in 1934. In *Xin nüxing/A Modern Woman* (Cai Chusheng, 1935) she went on to play an academically educated woman who kills herself to evade a press scandal. Shortly

after the release of this picture, the press launched a smear campaign against Ruan Lingyu, and she committed suicide. Though China has changed immensely since the 1930s, this way of filmmaking has not disappeared completely; it lives on in modern directors like Zhang Yimou and stars like Gong Li.

Today Pordenone stands at a crossroads. The festival of the silent film appears to have achieved its most ambitious aims: it has changed the world, it has set new standards, and it has become a model. At the same time, its resounding success has turned out to be its own worst enemy. Imitation has led to the creation of similar festivals in Bologna, Paris and other places, introducing new competitors into a small market. Neither the community of film historians nor the archives are available for all these events. Further specialization seems to be inevitable under these circumstances. To face the future, the festival will have to decide between its many options. No doubt they will surprise everybody.

*Karel Dibbets*

## reviews

### review:

**Parveen Adams, *The Emptiness of the Image*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, 173pp.**

**WHEDBEE MULLEN**

While many feminist critics have debated the merits and demerits of psychoanalysis as an integral theoretical model, Parveen Adams's *The Emptiness of the Image* is not afraid to examine the degree to which psychoanalysis can be refashioned for new tasks. *The Emptiness of the Image* sets out to prove psychoanalysis is more than a tool for describing, and perhaps reinforcing, culturally scripted interactions of the sexual and the social. Psychoanalysis is an instrument for detecting those anomalies in the field of representation whose deciphering might reveal as yet undescribed psychic structures. In this quest, Adams affirms the value of key psychoanalytic concepts – named as castration, the Oedipus complex and the phallus – to any endeavour directed towards a new understanding of sexual difference and identity.

*The Emptiness of the Image* ranges over a wide variety of issues and texts, both artistic and theoretical. Adams's argument divides largely into three parts. The opening of the book dwells on the nature of identification and sexual difference within Freudian psychoanalysis, with particular attention to the ways in which identification and desire might follow paths other than those organized by the Oedipal complex. The middle section sounds a cautionary note, as Adams rebukes an idealizing tendency in feminism that would wholly ignore the role of the phallus and the Oedipal taboo in constituting feminine desire and a representational space for fantasy. The latter section of the book is devoted to a lengthy comparison of the spectator's

experience of certain artworks with the effects of a Lacanian analysis on an analysand.

Although analyses of individual texts are careful and convincing, and the subject matter juicy enough to whet the appetite for more, unexplained changes in the analytic model from one part of the book to another may disorient the reader. As a collection of meditations on the image's resistance to interpretation, *The Emptiness of the Image* has much to offer. As an incrementally developed argument on the nature of sexual difference and identity, the book, which is almost wholly comprised of previously published articles, lacks a certain amount of connective tissue.

Many questions raised in the first part of the book are soon dropped, and only related with difficulty to later arguments. Take, for example, Adams's provocative claim that lesbian sadomasochism represents a 'new sexuality' (p. 36). Adams argues that lesbian sadomasochism, while springing from disavowal and involving fetishism, has nevertheless unseated the phallus from its place as paternal signifier (a place encrypted in the pervert's usual obsession with the phallic mother). With the paternal phallus removed as fixed star of desire, the lesbian sadomasochist is free to multiply her fantasies in new directions. What these directions are we never really learn; hence there is no way for the reader to determine how deep-seated the flexibility of lesbian sadomasochism is. If the lesbian sadomasochist knows that the phallus belongs to no one, what is she disavowing, and why is she constructing fetishes? Could she be disavowing the knowledge of the unattributable status of the phallus so as to garner the rebellious pleasure of pretending to take it away from its 'rightful' place? While questions such as these prove the fertility of Adams's work, they nevertheless reflect a certain paucity of information.

Adams unexpectedly follows up her treatment of sadomasochism with a bid for the importance of the phallus to the woman's assumption of her desire. By tracking the negative effects of the refusal of castration in Hélène Deutsch's theorization of the mother's 'wholeness', Adams makes her case *a contrario* for conserving a notion of the phallus as signifier of lack. Although Adams's cautionary remarks as to the indispensability of the concept of the phallus are also well argued, they leave open the essential problem of what she theorizes the Oedipus complex to be. On the one hand, we might accept that in lesbian sadomasochism the phallus is no longer moored to a particular object of desire, and on the other, find ourselves convinced by Adams's warning that a refusal of the role of the phallus in constituting feminine identity leads to a constriction of desire. In trying to negotiate between these two very different ways of arguing the role of the phallus, however, the reader must herself attempt to fill in the missing links.

One such link might be mustered from Adams's analysis of Della

Grace's photo *The Three Graces*, in which she proposes that the phallus can be divided into 'moments' (p. 138). In one moment, for which Adams coins the adjective 'dildoic', the phallus combines a certain presence or plenitude with a revelation of castration. This phallus can found a difference that is not one of 'being' and 'having', but that we could presume to be either difference in a pure form, or a difference constructed according to the terms of the moment, the specific time and place of the mise-en-scene of desire. Could the most radical conclusion of Adams's work be that there is no such thing as sexual difference in the time-honoured sense, only partial differences freely constituted and reconstituted according to the rhythms of diverse desires?

In a certain sense, the problem of sexual difference drops out of Adams's book, to be replaced first by a bipartisanship of identification, and second by a universal model of the subject's relation to the lack in the Other. The subject, whether male or female, faces the same challenge: to accept castration, to separate itself from the ideal object, to take up a relation to the phallus as signifier of lack. The difficulty lies in reconciling the two outcomes of this struggle proposed by the book, outcomes which imply two different visions of identity: one in which differences are freely constituted in a microclimate of desires; one in which the subject garners only the smallest of freedoms from the all-determining Other.

Let us consider this difficulty through Adams's arguments on identification. In the early part of the book Adams sets out a theory of hysterical identification which stresses not only the tendency of identifications within a fantasy scenario to oscillate between a masculine and a feminine position, but also the inevitability of this oscillation. Drawing on Freud's thesis of the coexistence of active and passive forms of the instinct, Adams argues that identification with one position always entails its opposite. Through a series of readings of dreams (drawn from *The Interpretation of Dreams*) and of fantasies (derived from the case of Dora) Adams convincingly demonstrates the possibility of overlapping structures of identification not heretofore remarked in this material. From this simultaneity of multiple structures of identification, she concludes that 'the point of identification is identification itself' (p. 16).

As original as Adams's analysis is, this cryptic formula is somewhat obscuring. If the wish to identify is fundamental, we may still ask where this wish comes from. At worst, the reader might conclude that Adams's argument has degenerated into tautology. However, her readings of specific dreams and fantasies indicate a concern to demonstrate a more intricate and diverse interplay of wishes and identifications in fantasy material than hitherto suspected, an interplay whose ebbs and flows have yet to be adequately charted.

Rather than pursue the ramifications of a polyvalent model of identification, Adams turns, in the latter part of her book, to a unitary

model of spectatorship based on the movements of transference and its liquidation in analysis. The initial terms for this model are set out in a reading of Mary Kelly's installation, *Interim*, which is compared in its structure to Lacan's discourse of the Analyst. The discourse of the Analyst differs from that of the Master, the University or the Hysteric in so far as it orients the subject and the *objet petit a*, the object cause of desire, in such a way as to allow for a modification in their relation. Certain artworks put forward the same combination of openness and resistance to interpretation that typify the person of the Analyst, placing the spectator in the role of analysand. So, for example, the obscure marks by which *Interim* indicates Mary Kelly's authorship direct the spectator's attention to an absence, making conscious both the spectator's investment in the artist as a site of knowledge, and the impossibility of reading off the author's intentionality, her knowledge, from the work. This spectator, whom Adams suggests may have entered the installation in the hopes of discovering something about her identity, learns something of desire instead. Finding her first expectation defeated, she gives up her quest for images that reflect her in a positive light, allowing herself instead to recognize the lack in the Other, and so engage her desire differently.

Here, for the first time, we are made aware of the import of Adams's title, *The Emptiness of the Image*. The resistance of certain images to the act of deciphering mimics the Analyst's silence, proof not that the Analyst knows, but that he lacks. The artwork, like the Analyst, may thus have the salutary effect of helping the spectator to distinguish the object of desire from an ideal object by leading her to recognize the lack in the Other. The emptying of the image empties the object of its idealized content, with the implication that the spectator's desire, like the analysand's, will now be freed to seek new objects. Adams explores this model and its variations in her remaining chapters on Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), Francis Bacon's painting and the performance art of Orlan (who makes live broadcasts of her own cosmetic surgery). In each case, Adams seeks out that aspect of the artwork which, through a process she likens to anamorphosis, exposes the Real – that which the Symbolic cannot represent and which bears witness to its incompleteness.

Applied to Mary Kelly's *Interim*, the transference model of aesthetic experience seems apt. By incorporating partial references to psychoanalysis, Kelly's installation deliberately incites the critic in the spectator, and so could conceivably become the site of a self-analysis on the part of the audience. Whether Adams's model works as well when applied to less cerebral artworks is unclear. What is it that prevents the empty image from soliciting the spectator to fill up the void with her own imaginary stopper, or from simply enjoying lack without analysing it? Faced with a painting by Francis Bacon, the spectator might well lay claim to an unanalysable emotion. In spite of the elegance of Adams's comparison between a certain kind of

shadow frequently seen in Bacon's work and the Lacanian notion of the 'lamella', can we really assert that Bacon's painting invites the kind of Lacanian distanciation Adams would find there? Or is it only after the intervention of the critic that a certain detachment is achieved? Indeed, there can be something monotonous in the current vogue for discovering the Real in art, even when, as in Adams's case, the Real is discovered so as to separate it from the object of desire. One has the sense that the subtlety of Adams's criticism has been deformed by the necessity of pulling the same Real rabbit out of different hats.

In sum, *The Emptiness of the Image* presents us with two quite different models of identification and desire. In one, identification is an independent and primal act informed from the very beginning by the ambivalence of the drive; moreover, desire is not oriented by identifications, or vice versa. In the other, desire and identification are both roped into the hapless task of repairing the Other, and can only be freed up to seek new objects after the equivalent of an analysis. The larger picture of how the subject moves from ambivalent identifications to fixed identifications, acquiring an identity, then moving beyond that identity in analysis, is not theorized in all of its stages. Adams's difficulty in pulling together the various strands of her argument is perhaps inherent in the exploratory nature of her ambitious enterprise. Working from concrete analyses of material chosen precisely for its resistance to traditional psychoanalytic models, her overarching theory of sexual difference and identity could but be inchoate. While the incompleteness of her arguments might reflect the permanent incompleteness of the subject, an acknowledgement of this state, and of the questions it raises, would serve to orient the reader in the complex web of Adams's reflections on psychoanalysis.

## review:

Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men* and *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993 and 1995, 221pp. and 296pp.

## JUDE DAVIES

Kirkham's and Thumim's decision to arrange writing on film masculinity into two volumes on the basis of the sex of the contributors is born out of an avowed interest in the importance of gender in defining individual responses and viewing pleasure. This procedure is not without its risks. It may be seen as inscribing a theoretical gender essentialism, or as inviting contributions which either place too much emphasis on the mode of personal confession, or which are too confident of the typicality of the contributor's response for her/his gender, ethnicity, class or age. To the credit of the editors and their contributors, these tendencies are kept to a minimum in both volumes. Some academic readers will find a small minority of the writing overly confessional, and considerations of non-heterosexual and non-white positions are not as thoroughly integrated into the principally psychoanalytic theoretical context as they might be. Nevertheless, it is clear that Kirkham and Thumim exercised a high degree of editorial input with both volumes, and their contributors have responded with constructive and suggestively self-reflexive commentaries that delineate and communicate a range of viewing pleasures with precision, and, for the most part, resist the reiteration of androcentrism that threatens critical writing about masculinity. *Me Jane*, in particular, has strong claims to become a standard text for courses on film and masculinity.

In both collections, the primary focus is on Hollywood: epic, war,

science fiction and horror in *You Tarzan*; thrillers, westerns and melodramas in *Me Jane*; an essay on Tarzan in each. But there are also several essays on British cinema, and one apiece on French, Italian, Indian and Spanish subjects. Many articles situate themselves with respect to psychoanalytic film theory, citing primarily Freud, Lacan, Mulvey, and Steve Neale's 1983 *Screen* essay on masculinity as spectacle. In addition, the essays draw heavily on genre theory, especially with respect to melodrama, and on star studies. A little less often, and less explicitly, there is an openness to reception theory, auteurism, and to perspectives in cultural studies and American studies. What sustains the quality and precision of these essays is their engagement in a dialogue concerning a series of related issues and problems in filmic constructions of masculinity and its theorization. The issue of the gendered subjectivity of film readers, signalled in the titles and organization of the volumes, is not offered as theoretically resolved but rather as the subject of an ongoing debate. This debate is structured by two related issues: the risk of androcentrism in studies of masculinity, and the question of the flexibility of psychoanalytic film theory. In the process of discussion, positions in psychoanalysis and film theory are reworked via an interest in multiple receptions, readings and viewing pleasures, connecting the analyses of individual films and responses to wider issues of representation and consumption without enforcing a theoretical one dimensionality. Helpfully, Kirkham and Thumim contribute extended introductions to both volumes, entitled 'You Tarzan' and 'Me Jane', which set out theoretical overviews of the material contained therein.

In 'You Tarzan', Kirkham and Thumim summarize sites of discussion under headings of the body, action, the external and the internal worlds. In its companion volume, the categories used by the editors have become more slippery, but also more explicitly informed by debates both within film theory and in the areas of cultural studies, sociology and gender politics. The categorizations described in 'Me Jane' are therefore slightly reorganized and explained. The headings of the internal world (the psychic construction of identity) and the external world (the social playing out of representations of masculinity) are retained – although with different emphasis – while the body, action and inaction are subsumed under one heading, and 'the politics of gender' is separated off for clearer focus. As Kirkham and Thumim point out, 'a dominant concern among the contributors to *Me Jane* is with the moral conflict which ensues once gendered values are "lent" or "borrowed" to inform filmic constructions of social conflicts – not only the conflicts of gender but also those of race, class, age and citizenship' (*Me Jane*, p. 28).

Although the use of a moral register here strikes a false note, this is a key theoretical move, opening up a Lacanian sense of the absolute priority of gender as a condition of meaning to a pluralism of reading and interpretation. This brings into focus not only the symbolic uses of

masculinity and femininity, but also the diegetic and extra-diegetic relationships between constructions of gender as gender, and gender as symbolic of other social conflicts. Although Kirkham and Thumim, perhaps in retrospect, understate the openness to this theme of some of the essays in *You Tarzan* (for example, Paul Wells's examination of shrinking masculinity in 1950s science fiction B-movies), the changes of emphasis between the two volumes do add up to a significant theoretical shift. The essays in *You Tarzan* are more discursive, contributors for the most part tracking the signs and performance of masculinity. Freudian and Lacanian theory is utilized here on occasion, but it figures much more often and more centrally in *Me Jane*, where it is in a more productive tension with an interest in diverse forms of individual subjectivity, and with more culturalist and readerly modes of response to film. What is particularly impressive in 'Me Jane' is the care with which Kirkham and Thumim facilitate discussion of the symbolic uses of gender, while maintaining a focus on the existence and the reproduction of patriarchal power, and of feminist resistance (see *Me Jane*, p. 18).

The most significant focus of this dialogue between psychoanalysis and other modes of film criticism is the figure that Christine Gledhill calls 'the wounded man'. Gledhill's essay 'Women reading men' is one of the most sustained theoretical arguments of the collection, and its interests are echoed to a large degree in other contributions, as Kirkham and Thumim demonstrate in 'Me Jane'. Gledhill draws on work on melodrama and romance by Peter Brooks, Janice Radway and Rozsika Parker to focus attention on cinematic representations of weakened masculinity whereby, it is argued, physical or psychological wounding 'makes the male figure accessible to the female imagination' (*Me Jane*, p. 87). Gledhill asserts the importance of the melodramatic aesthetic of conflict in enabling the consumption of films as the material of cultural struggle, rather than as embodying ideological structures of mystification. This is a very useful consideration of representations of and by gender. However, in retaining the Lacanian assumption of the heterosexual gender binary as a primary category of the production of meaning, it is not quite clear how other discourses of identity might be read as directly politicized. Consideration of the 'wounded man' is taken up again in two further contributions which also revisit Parker's essay: Pat Kirkham's piece on 1920s Hollywood, and Susannah Radstone's consideration of Al Pacino in *Sea of Love* (Harold Becker, 1989). Both of these build upon Parker, but offer a revisionist perspective on her essay via a questioning of its rigid heterosexual binary. Kirkham argues that the 1920s films of Frank Borzage refuse the identifications of desirability with femininity, and of female desire as having to be sublimated into maternal pity. Radstone brings into play discourses of ethnicity in her account of Pacino's desirability, and theorizes her own response as compounded of both sadistic and masochistic identification.

The issue of the wounded man is related to genre in two further essays: Kathleen Rowe's 'Melodrama and men in post-classical romantic comedy', and a piece by Janet Thumim on competence and incompetence in *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992). Both Rowe and Thumim stress the importance of genre in helping to determine the significance of male wounding and weakness. Rowe describes the use of melodramatic forms in post-classical romantic comedies such as *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) as a means of invoking a nostalgia for male narcissism and sympathy for male characters whose misfortunes would have been treated as ridiculous and laughable in classical comedy. Thumim discerns the working of melodrama and realist modes side by side in *Unforgiven*, producing a doubling of the film's representation of masculinity in crisis. For her, the stress laid by realist modes on competence is ultimately more powerful than the emphasis on male crisis engendered by the film's melodramatic strain.

It is a feature of both volumes, but particularly of *Me Jane*, that the essays on individual star figures (Rock Hudson, Clark Gable, Amitabh Bachchan, Albert Finney, Al Pacino, Burt Lancaster, Jean Gabin and Robert De Niro) offer insights into cinematic constructions of masculinity that range wider than their immediate context. For example, Gillian Swanson writing on Burt Lancaster in Visconti's risorgimento historical film *The Leopard* (Italy, 1963), and Ashwani Sharma in discussing Amitabh Bachchan, one of the best-known stars of Bombay cinema, examine the connections between cinematic representations of masculinity and extratextual political conflicts in two very different social formations. For Sharma, the recent history of Indian industrialization has created an underclass for whom Bachchan represents, without significant contradiction, both sensitive son and aggressive rebel.

In the densely argued 'Burt's neck: masculine corporeality and estrangement', Swanson interrogates the Lacanian association of masculinity with ego-boundedness and femininity with contingency by treating masculinity as a historical problematic. For Swanson, Burt Lancaster's performance of masculinity in the film is constructed out of a social problematic of national identification and political contract. Thus, the two poles of Lancaster's performance, defined by Swanson as 'physical grandeur and gestural hesitancy', are indicative of what she calls the 'fracture within which masculinity itself is constructed' (*Me Jane*, p. 208). Crucially, for Swanson, *The Leopard*'s subject matter implies that this fracture is neither that of the Oedipal family nor that of linguistic presence, but is produced by the historical political shift between feudalism and liberal democracy. By this definition, masculinity is split between the straightforwardly patriarchal subject of feudalism, defined exclusively by birth, and the dispersed selfhood of liberal democracy, where authority is created as a feature of civil right. As a hereditary prince, during the course of the film Lancaster/Fabrizio loses his historical authority, but he is

approached to represent Sicily in the Italian senate by the emissary of a democratic administration. In declining this offer, Lancaster/Fabrizio illustrates what Swanson calls the dispersal of self-presence associated with democratic society, while his performance, in combining physical grandeur and gestural hesitancy, continually reasserts the holism of masculinity.

One of the important conclusions that Swanson draws from this is that the marginalization of femininity needs to be achieved cinematically, as opposed to more straightforwardly Lacanian readings of the gendering of identity as constructed formally at a pre-political level. Even though liberal democratic authority is predicated on the gendered distinction between the particularized feminine and the masculine conceived of as no one in particular, this distinction is seen as dynamic and needing perpetual sustenance or regeneration. Swanson goes on to use Kristeva's notion of the foreigner not, as is often done, to investigate female subjectivity, but to unlock constructions of masculinity and the notions of political authority and citizenship predicated on it. Here, instead of following Janice Radway's work on romance as do many other contributors to discussion of the 'wounded man', Swanson reads this construction as a figuration of self-dispersal and foreignness to self-representation, usually conceived of as 'typically' feminine, but which in *The Leopard* is associated with masculinity.

Although there are some useful historicist and auteurist essays in *You Tarzan and Me Jane*, the contributions describe a trajectory which increasingly problematizes gender as a basic condition of the cinematic production of meaning. It is therefore not only appropriate, but also salutary, that the final essay in *Me Jane* argues persuasively that film texts can utilize representations of gender and sexuality in order to displace consideration of other issues, in this case race and nationalist politics. In '“Nothing is as it seems”: re-viewing *The Crying Game*', Lola Young shows how the film's fascination with the spectacle of crossdressing works to obscure pressing questions of race and sexuality. This is an astringent piece which takes account of the politicization and depoliticization of gendered and racial identity in film diegesis and in popular film criticism. Rather than engaging in theoretical contestation, therefore, Young seeks to intervene strategically in the circulation of interpretations of *The Crying Game*. This is not a conclusion or a resolution of the issues raised across these collections, but Young's article epitomizes the strengths of *Me Jane* in its vitality and in its offering of strategic engagement over theoretical closure.

## review:

**Jostein Gripsrud, *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies*. London: Routledge, 1995, 316 pp.**

## IEN ANG

At last, Jostein Gripsrud's long-awaited book on *Dynasty* has appeared. I have long been curious as to what he would come up with, especially as I had come to know Jostein as an acerbic critic of my own work on *Dallas*, published precisely ten years ago, which he considered too populist, apologetic, in short, not 'critical' enough. But we have never had the opportunity to discuss our (dis)agreements at any serious length, so I thought writing this review might perhaps address this lack. And sure enough, Jostein does manage, in his typical, wilfully polemical style, to throw in some quite biting lines in my direction (for example, p. 123) as well as in the direction of a whole range of other authors – but in fact, I am relieved to say, it is not that bad. Once we become used to Gripsrud's style of enunciation through critical distantiation – a rather aggressive personal style of writing which he masters eloquently but which he also, rather unselfconsciously, elevates to the status of preferred style for cultural criticism in general – *The Dynasty Years* can be appreciated as a solid, sensible and intelligent piece of work which should be read by anyone interested in the development of 'critical media studies' in the past fifteen years or so.

*The Dynasty Years* is in many respects a modernist book. It aims to cover a comprehensive, if not totalizing, understanding of *Dynasty* (as a television text produced in Hollywood and as a cultural event in Norway), but in so doing, Gripsrud also wants to offer 'a critical discussion of central theoretical and methodological positions in recent

media and cultural studies' (p. 1). Thus, we are offered a wide-ranging book which includes reflections on the use of quantitative methodology as well as a critique of the notion of polysemy, a statement of the importance of television production as site of power as well as of the role of television criticism.

I should like to focus on what I think is the most interesting analytical thread of *The Dynasty Years*: its discussion of *Dynasty* as a 'sign of the times', 'a "symptom" or "discursive intersection" of fundamental changes in both international and national structures of media and culture' (p. 17). These changes all took place, according to Gripsrud, in the early 1980s – when the success of US prime-time soap operas such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* was at its height – and pertain to a radical internationalization of culture and media, especially television; an increasing commercialization of the media; changing relations between high and low/popular culture; and a relative weakening of the traditions and institutions of popular enlightenment, such as public service broadcasting. All these changes can very aptly and succinctly be characterized as cultural postmodernization, and Gripsrud's book can be read as a reflection on how one should respond to this complex process of social and cultural change. His answer to this question is itself a moderately modernist one: *The Dynasty Years*, he says, offers 'a conditional, negotiated defence of "traditional" critical positions' (p. 18). That is, Gripsrud's project seems to provide the critical resources to put a brake on what might be called 'rampant postmodernization', the spectre of which haunts contemporary critical intellectuals such as he. He recognizes the structural importance of the changes involved, but does not want to give in to their consequences completely. This is why I call his book 'sensible'.

Gripsrud argues convincingly that *Dynasty* was an important cultural event in Norway because it was 'both a *sign* of a historical shift in Norwegian broadcasting and . . . also an *instrument* for change' (p. 105). As in many other countries in western Europe, where nationalist, centralist institutions of public service broadcasting were thrown into crisis by the advent and the competition of more commercial, more popular/populist, more 'Americanized' television, the NRK had to transform itself in the wake of *Dynasty*'s extraordinary success among Norwegian audiences. It became more entertainment oriented and more sensitive to audience demand, and introduced, for the first time in its history, a permanent ratings measurement system.

What is particularly interesting about the Norwegian case is that these 'adjustments' in public service broadcasting happened *so late*. As I have described in my own work,<sup>1</sup> similar developments took place in the Netherlands, but over a much longer period: commercial 'contamination' of the public service broadcasting system began in the late 1960s (with the admission of an avowedly populist broadcaster

1 Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991).

within the system and the introduction of ratings as early as 1965), resulting in the inevitable dilution of the popular enlightenment mission of the system as a whole. In this context, *Dallas* played a significant role as a *culmination* of the crisis of Dutch public service broadcasting which had already been set in motion a decade earlier. In Norway, however, the whole crisis (and its provisional resolution) seems to have been *condensed* in the *Dynasty* event. In this sense, the Norwegian experience offers a much 'purer' case than the Dutch of what is at stake in the transition from 'modern' to 'postmodern' in the world of (north-western) European television.

*The Dynasty Years*, then, is a very *European* book, describing a cultural transformation which is distinctively European and elaborating an intellectual response to that transformation which is also peculiarly European. The kinds of critical positions Gripsrud puts forward (anti-relativism, anti-populism but also anti-elitism, in favour of explicating criteria for textual 'quality', in short, against rampant postmodernization) only make full sense, I would argue, precisely in the specific transitional European cultural time-space in which he aims to intervene. For complex historical reasons not yet quite clear to me, Scandinavia has been the most 'pure' site for these transitions.

Seen in this way, we can begin to understand something which has preoccupied me for a long time. Why is it, I have often wondered, that the brand of media studies called 'reception analysis' has been particularly vigorous and influential in Nordic countries? I am thinking here of work by researchers such as Kim Schrøder in Denmark, Pertti Alatusaari in Finland, Peter Dahlgren in Sweden and, of course, Jostein Gripsrud himself in Norway. There is a common thread to this work which makes it different from the cultural populism of Anglo-US celebratory audience studies – such as those of John Fiske or Dorothy Hobson – which present themselves explicitly and unapologetically as documents of 'the power of the popular'. I think that this work – which has been the object of so much derision and criticism of late, and not always fairly – can be read as a redemptive discourse which is in effect an acknowledgement of the irrevocable institutional hegemony of the forces of capitalism and commercialism in the cultural industries, a hegemony which can only marginally be subverted through 'recalcitrant' readings. The Nordic work, on the other hand, is informed by a different relation to the institutional dominant: it is the assumptions of the classic public service institutions, not those of commercialism, which Nordic reception analyses were questioning by emphasizing the 'activeness' and variety of audience readings and pleasures. In other words, reception analysis in northern Europe had a much more 'progressive' significance than elsewhere, in that it contributed to, as much as it signified, an opening up of the realm of taste and aesthetic value to popular perspective. As Gripsrud puts it, 'The 1980s brought a new awareness and validation

of cultural difference which is essential to democratic cultural policies' (p. 19). It should be added, however, that such awareness and validation (even if only cynically or reluctantly) was nothing new in many other places in the world where aesthetic value was never so centrally organized (for example, in the form of an officially validated national 'high culture' by institutions such as the NRK) as in a country such as Norway.

What is also distinctive about the Nordic work is its concern with 'quality', with the aim of influencing institutional reform. Gripsrud speaks here of the need for a 'productive dialogue' between academic critics and television production people. The eventual outcome of that dialogue, if I understand Gripsrud rightly, should be some shared and sophisticated judgement of 'good' and 'not so good' television texts. It is here that I want to take issue with Gripsrud's modernist idealism. For example, he says provocatively (and I agree) that 'Much television is actually a lot more boring than criticism has normally admitted' (p. 260). But then he goes on to suggest that television *should not* be boring, and that critics should work towards lessening the insignificance of television for its audiences by way of public debate and direct contact with broadcasting institutions. All well and good, but I think this underestimates the structural factors – at the sites of both production and consumption – which produce the boringness of, and boredom with, contemporary television in the first place. The very ubiquity of television in everyday life – a centrality which has at once been forced upon us and is completely naturalized – is one such factor. In other words, what Gripsrud seems not to take into account is the extent to which aspects of cultural postmodernization (which are related to the incremental universalization of capitalism in all areas of life) produce structural constraints beyond the control of cultural policy.

Gripsrud's is a rather optimistic and idealist conception of the role of the critical intellectual – a conception which, again, should be put in the context of the largely social democratic public sphere of northern Europe. Social democracy, of course, is an intellectual formation which is based on the idea of cultural management and social inclusion led by a benevolent national political elite. But in a time of globalization, transnationalization and fragmentation, the organic world view of social democracy (with its invocation of a unified and harmonious national-popular) may no longer be sustainable. Thus, I am simply not as confident as Gripsrud about the effective possibilities of critical intervention in the construction of television culture. In this sense, I tend to share Negt and Kluge's position, which Gripsrud sees as too pessimistic (p. 261). This does *not* mean that intellectuals should no longer engage in television criticism; it does mean, in my view, that their self-conception should shift, in Zygmunt Bauman's terms, from that of modernist legislators to that of postmodernist interpreters – a much more modest and less

2 Zygmunt Baumann, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Postmodernity and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987).

universalist conception of what it means to do critical intellectual work.<sup>2</sup>

The intellectual as postmodernist interpreter is much more aware of her/his own limit(ation)s as producer of discourse, given her/his inescapable entanglement with the social system in which she/he works. Ironically, *The Dynasty Years* is proof of just this, in that the thrust of Gripsrud's work makes most sense if it is read against the background of its Norwegian context. But in my view, the positionality and partiality of any critical stance should be made explicit in a much more specific sense than Gripsrud does. Gripsrud still hangs on to – and tends to romanticize – an old, universalist and modernist definition of the intellectual. He defines himself purely and simply – and unproblematically – as 'intellectual', as if this can be an encompassing identity not intersected by 'embodied' subject positions related to, for example, gender and ethnicity. Thus, the distinctive feature of 'intellectuals', for Gripsrud, is their 'cultural capital', which always separates them from 'the people'. But I would argue that this is far too totalizing a perspective. Is Gripsrud not also a man and does this not affect his subjectivity as well, making him share things with other, not necessarily intellectual, men, and separating him, in important respects, from women, both intellectual and non-intellectual? I do not want to be socially determinist here, but I do want to point to the need to be more self-reflexive about the situatedness of our intellectual speaking positions.

For example, only in passing does Gripsrud give us a glimpse of his own subjective relation to *Dynasty* (p. 100), where he discloses that an ironic and playful attitude is 'definitely closer to my own personal feelings about the serial'. What I would like to know is how this position is not only informed by Gripsrud's intellectual being, but also, say, that of his gendered being. After all, it has been established in much research (including Gripsrud's own) that soap operas (including irreverent ones such as *Dynasty*) are watched mostly by women, for whom the playful and ironic attitude is often far from preferred – many of them are drawn to soap opera's 'emotional realism' which, as I have argued in *Watching Dallas*, is often the object of ridicule by those who have access to the power of irony.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, the attitude of 'ironic acceptance' also emerged as the dominant one in Norwegian public discourse throughout the 1980s, so much so that Gripsrud could conclude that *Dynasty* served as 'a training in "camp" attitudes to television, particularly in the educated middle classes' (p. 101). What this exemplifies is how the intellectual's personal attitude is actually complicit with a dominant cultural formation. In this sense, the 'social marginality' Gripsrud claims for his disembodied intellectuals should be doubted, or at least bracketed. If 'camp' has become the dominant European mode of appreciating US popular culture – and I believe it has – from which most 'ordinary people' are excluded, then it is time to submit

3 Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985).

precisely this emerging cultural dominant (and the positions of power it sustains or produces) to critical scrutiny. This must involve a heightened critical self-reflection on the inescapable 'personal' politics of the critical intellectual 'himself'.

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